

Ph.D. Thesis

"Clash Of Cultures in the Dramas of Wole Soyinka."

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Certificate

This is to certify that Mrs. Kajal Srivastava has worked under my supervision for her doctoral dissertation, titled "**Clash of Cultures in the dramas of Wole Soyinka**" for more than twenty four months. The thesis embodies Mrs. Kajal Srivastava's discovery and original analysis of the various aspects of the subject.

To the best of my knowledge and belief the thesis-

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Place: *Jhansi*
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INTRODUCTION

Nobel : Wole Soyinka

Date of Birth : 13th July, 1934



Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 (i) LIFE OF WOLE SOYINKA

Wole Soyinka happens to be an awe-inspiring personality in the literary world. From the very beginning, he has been an individual with clear-cut values and ideals. His life is one of the rare, riveting biographies of our time. He was born in Ijebu, in Western Nigeria on the 13th July in 1934 and his full name is Akinwande Oluwole Soyinka. Wole's father; Ayo, was a school- teacher while his mother, Eniola was a "trader."¹

From 1940-1952, Soyinka attended primary school in Abeokuta² and further went on to the secondary school at the Government College at Ibadan. He then attended the University College of Ibadan, which was affiliated with the University of London. Thereafter, he studied at the Leeds University in England, where he came under the influence of the brilliant scholar; G. Wilson Knight.

The fifties were a period of great experimentation in the theatre, both in France and England, and Soyinka was involved with various productions in Great Britain. These were, "The Swamp Dwellers"³ and "The Lion and the Jewel" for the University of London Drama Festival.

He also wrote, produced and acted in “An Evening without Décor,” a medley of his work, at the Royal Court Theatre, London. He attacked racism and colonial repression in Africa in these works.

In 1960, Soyinka returned to Nigeria, having been commissioned to write a play to celebrate the nation’s independence. Namely, “A Dance of the Forests.” It was a lyrical blend of Western experimentalism and African folk tradition, reflecting a highly original approach to drama. He has always emphasized his African roots to acknowledge the role that Yoruba pageantry has played in his work. From the beginning he was a political figure. During the Nigerian Civil War he was not sufficiently anti-Biafran⁴ to suit the Government and was put into solitary confinement for two years, being released only after an intense international campaign. Soyinka’s passion for the written word is nowhere more poignantly revealed than by his actions during political imprisonment. He was denied reading and writing materials, but he manufactured his own ink and began to keep a prison diary, written on toilet paper, cigarette packages and in between the lines of the few books he secretly obtained. Each poem or fragment from the journal he

managed to smuggle to the outside world became a literary event and a reassurance to his supporters that Soyinka⁵ was still alive.

In 1986, Soyinka won the Nobel Prize for Literature. He was the first African to win the prize for Literature. He received this prize from Sweden's King Carl Gustaf on 6th December 1986. In his Nobel lecture on 8th December, Soyinka stated:

“And of those imperatives that challenge our being, our presence, and humane definition at this time, none can be considered more pervasive than the end of racism, the eradication of human inequality, and the dismantling of all their structures. The prize is the consequent enthronement of its complement: universal sufferance and peace.”

In 1996, Wole Soyinka left Harvard to become the Robert W. Woodruff Professor of Arts at Emory. He is presently in the Program of African American Studies where he teaches, collaborates with Theater Emory on artistic productions, and to collaborate with programs on creative writing, liberal arts, philosophy, art history, political science and religion.

(ii)

WORKS OF WOLE SOYINKA

Soyinka has written in the modes of drama (*Death and the King's Horseman, The Swamp Dwellers, The Lion and the Jewel, The Trials of Brother Jero, Madmen and Specialists and The Beatification of Area Boy*), poetry (*Idanre and other poems, A shuttle in the Crypt, Poems from Prison*), autobiography (*Ake': The Years of Childhood, Isara A Voyage around Essay*), novels (*The Interpreters, Season of Anomy*), literary and cultural criticism (*Myth, Literature and the African World*) and political criticism (*The Open Sore of a continent: A Personal Narrative of the Nigerian Crisis*).

Soyinka not only writes for the stage but is also active in directing and producing of theatre. The role of performative art is very important in shaping and regenerating the culture and political identity of a people and nation for Soyinka. Art connects the culture of a people with the cosmic and archetypal primal sources of beginnings. Soyinka's belief in the interrelation between a culture's art and its cosmic history is manifested in his depiction of his Yoruba cosmology in his writings. Due to the infusion of Yoruba deities and folklore some of Soyinka's writings

may be very distant from the average knowledge and expectations of western readership.

The following text will hopefully serve as an introduction to a wide scope of Soyinka's works. The cultural intricacies and weight of Yoruban myth will not be explicated here, but the relation between Soyinka's use of Yoruban myth and his ideas on the western mind and reader will be examined.

In the following pages some of his renowned works will be discussed, offering light to some of the themes and ideas Soyinka used frequently in his writings.

Soyinka as a Playwright

"The Lion and the Jewel" is one of Soyinka's most popular plays. It was written in 1963. Despite the occasional use of unconventional devices, it is a highly entertaining play. It explores the value of Yoruba ways versus European innovations. However, some modern readers object to its treatment of women and find the humor spoilt by sexism.

According to Patrick Wilmot⁶, Soyinka, his friend, is an icon for students: " He speaks his mind and he's willing to stick his neck out and fight; he's not afraid of anybody." But while Marxist playwrights such as

Femi Osofisan, were accusing Soyinka of “ideological ambiguity,” feminists in the 1980’s found fault with his portrayal of women. For Carole Boyce –Davies, now Professor of English and African world studies at Florida International University, his women conformed to three types: “maidens, mistresses and matrons.” He is not a feminist, Msika⁷ concedes, “but neither is he a misogynist. He is a man who respects women, though he also loves women as a source of pleasure, and doesn’t find that offensive. His women are earth mothers; he idealizes them as goddesses.”

I feel that Soyinka has never, in any of his works, portrayed women solely as mere objects of deriving pleasure. Instead, he has taken into account their problems relating to the African male dominated society and posed them in a very matter-of-fact manner. He has further gone on to explain the cultural clash which poses as a dilemma for the Nigerian people. They are caught between two cultures, that is European versus Yoruba.

“Madmen and Specialists” is another famous play written by Soyinka in 1970. This play was written shortly after Soyinka was released from prison. It reflects not only his personal mood at the time,

but the horrors of Nigerian Civil war of 1966-1970. The ferocity of the fighting between Biafrans and other Nigerians was unprecedented in scale and intensity; and much of the nation was still in shock. He has fused Yoruban and Greek elements to form a tragedy in this play.

"Like Sophocles and Euripedes, Soyinka derived a secular poetics and aesthetics from religious mythology, fusing Yoruba and Greek elements into a distinctively African notion of tragedy," says Malawian critic Mpalive-Hangson Msika, who is also the author of the 1998 book "Wole Soyinka (Northcote House)." For Msika, Soyinka's art was a precursor of the "hybridity" proclaimed by postcolonial critics such as Homi Bhabha. Soyinka drew on O'Neill and Synge, Beckett and Brecht. His refusal to cut off of any source of knowledge drew opprobrium from Chinweizu and fellow Nigerian critics in "Toward the Decolonization of African Literature" (1980). They attacked him as a "Euro-assimilationist" for paying "imitative homage" to the western canon. His "coup" against Negritude⁸ had stymied the spread of black consciousness to Britain's former colonies, they say.

For Msika, his plays possess a "necessary difficulty: they use a variety of western and African idioms, but move between them fluidly,

without sign posting the boundaries between cultures." While many see his art as darkening after his imprisonment, for the British poet and playwright Gabriel Gbadamosi, Soyinka's voice was saved from becoming "bleakly destructive or disillusioned."

"The Beatification of Area Boy," a play set in present-day Lagos, premiered at the West Yorkshire Playhouse in 1995. At rehearsals its director, Jude Kelly found Soyinka "very respectful of actors; tough about what he doesn't agree with, but open." It played in Leeds the night Ken Saro-Wiwa⁹ was executed. "It became a hugely involving, emotional experience," says Kelly, for whom Soyinka is "still able to write plays that are cathartic - full of warning and pity".

The reception for "King Baabu" was more equivocal. Helon Habila, Nigerian winner of the Caine prize for African writing, and writer in residence at the University of East Anglia, attended its glittering premier in Lagos. He found the play "too strident and its message over-hammered", but thought reviewers were inhibited from saying so. In Kelly's view the "tragedy of Wole's situation is that, because Nigeria's been so war-torn, he's not been able to build a substantive theatre company. Ideally, he'd have a permanent troupe of fine actors who

understood the culture from which he's writing and could transmit both its authenticity and its universality." According to Habila, Soyinka is better known in Nigeria as a political activist than a playwright, though he remains an influence on younger writers. "He's been an example for people because he's lived what he believes in," he says.

Soyinka as a Critic

Soyinka and Philosophic Traditions: European and African

In "Myth, Literature and the African World"¹⁰, Soyinka discusses the intellectual history of the search for the African essence and whether the essence was ever destroyed to begin with for the majority of Africa during the colonial "clash of cultures." Soyinka places himself in opposition to the search for "Africaness" by Negritudinist writers by proposing that the majority of Africans "never at any time had cause to question the existence of their—Negritude." Soyinka identifies the basis of the misreading by the Negritudinists in their incorrect application of a supposedly 'universal' set of western philosophic ideas to the colonial African situation: "The fundamental error was one of procedure:

Negritude stayed within a pre-set system of Eurocentric intellectual analysis both of man and society and tried to re-define the African and his society in those terms. In the end, even the poetry of celebration for this supposed self-retrieval became indistinguishable from the mainstream of French poetry."

It must also be noted in light of this critique upon western ideas that Soyinka is a student and contributor to the western philosophic and artistic traditions. Throughout his texts Soyinka uses the work of Nietzsche, Sartre, and Fanon as well as re-writing ancient Greek drama. Soyinka answers the misapplication of western modes of thought to an African world by creating an ingenious parable where Descartes is written into a philosophic confrontation with an African and his "Corgito ergo sum." is re-written by the African "authentic black innocent":

Soyinka wants to dispel the idea of the "feeling intuitive Africa" in opposition to the "rational thinking European." It is not a difference of reason versus emotion but a difference of worldviews and modes of thought. The African finds it ridiculous compartmentalize the mind in this way. Soyinka re-writes the western obsession with the nature of the human subject as a neurotic weakness. It is immodest to reduce the existence of being to a human "particularism" of "thinking."

Another critical writing of Soyinka, and one which deserves praise is; “ The Open Sore of a Continent; A Personal Narrative of the Nigerian Crisis.” It consists of the events that led up to dissident writer Ken Saro-Wiwa's execution on November 10, 1995, marking Nigeria's decline from a post-colonial success story to its current military dictatorship. Few writers have been more outspoken in decrying and lamenting this decline than Nobel Prize laureate and Nigerian exile Wole Soyinka.

In “The Open Sore of a Continent,” Soyinka, whose own Nigerian passport was confiscated by General Abacha in 1994, explores the history and future of Nigeria in a compelling jeremiad that is as intense as it is provocative, learned, and wide-ranging. He deftly explains the shifting dramatis personae of Nigerian history and politics to Westerners unfamiliar with the players and the process, tracing the growth of Nigeria as a player in the world economy. And, in the process of elucidating the Nigerian crisis, Soyinka opens readers to the broader questions of nationhood, identity, and the general state of African culture and politics at the end of the twentieth century. Here are a range of issues that investigate the interaction of peoples who have been shaped by the clash of cultures: nationalism, power, corruption, violence, and the enduring legacy of colonialism. Soyinka concludes with a resounding call for the

global community to address the issue of nationhood to prevent further religious tyrannies and calls for ethnic purity of the sort that have turned Algeria, Rwanda, Bosnia, and Sri Lanka into killing fields.

An important and timely volume, "The Open Sore of a Continent" is required reading for anyone who cares about Africa, human rights, and the future of the global village.

According to Emerge¹¹; "Soyinka, brilliant as always, clearly and succinctly introduces the reader to the political situation of his native Nigeria.... An important book and absolutely essential in understanding the crisis that faces not just Nigeria, but Africa as a whole."

Soyinka as a Novelist

As a novelist, Soyinka has written "Season of Anomy" and "The Interpreters." It can be said that just as Soyinka excelled in his writings as a playwright and a critic, in the same manner, his works as a novelist are also remarkable.

"The Interpreters" demonstrates that the postcolonial realities of Africa cannot be put into one single narrative or framed in one simple format. Soyinka is one of those African writers who rejects stereotypical

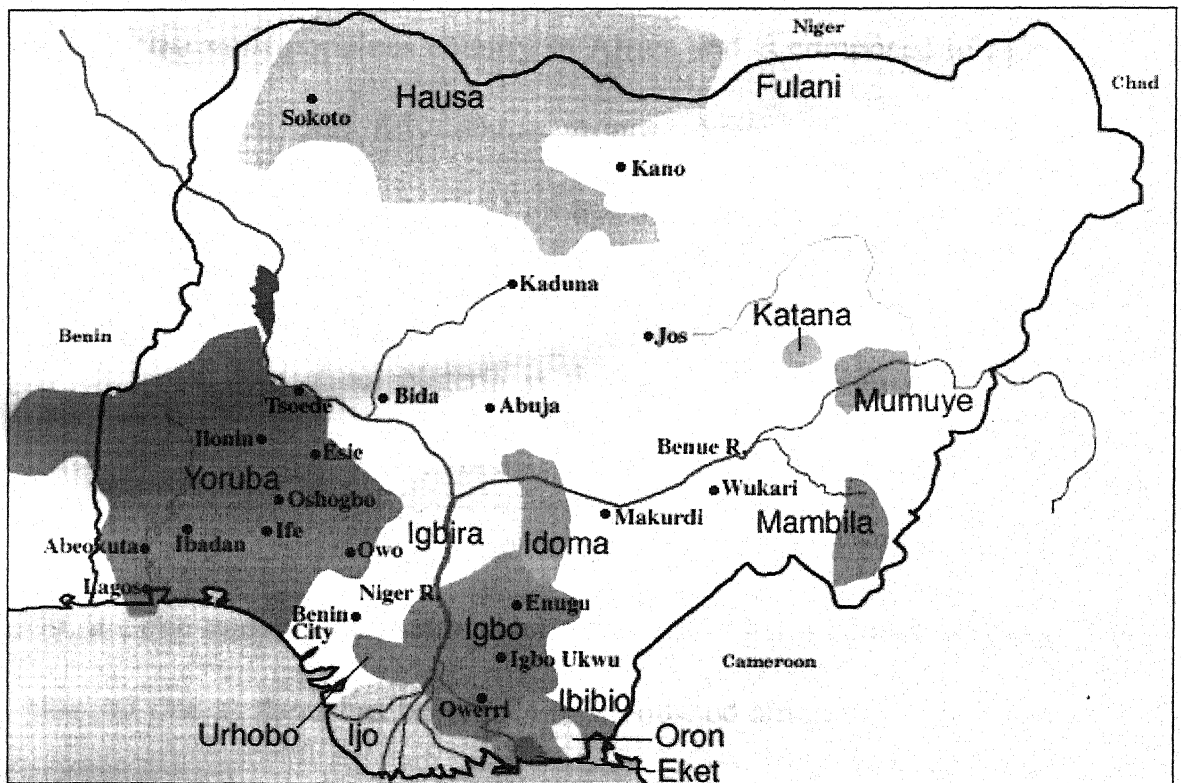
representation, is aware of the diversity of post-colonialism's inherent in his own country, and commits boldly transgressive acts against pre-established dogmas. Indeed, "The Interpreters" was published in 1965, five years after Nigeria got its political independence. In other words, the context was one riddled with "grand-narratives" tinged with nationalistic fervor. It was profane, therefore, for any type of narrative to side step the boundaries laid by these political and social realities. But "The Interpreters" committed, to use Foucault's words, an "epistemic violence" of a greater magnitude by baffling some the elementary pedagogical rules set up by a carefully built Nationalist tradition. The narrative, in this sense, can be seen as a profane challenge in that it violates the norms of an established canon. The method used in this violation is what I have ventured to call The Interpreters' Cultural Politics. Consequently, the narrative reconsiders the sub-Saharan tradition, it also enacts another violence on its own boundaries and ironically invites the reader to do so.

Soyinka as a Poet

As a poet, Soyinka has written three books, namely; "A Shuttle in The Crypt" "Indanre and other poems" and "Poems from Prison." These books contain a variety of poems, which were put collectively by him.

These poems also deal with problems relating to Nigeria and Africa in particular. However, “Poems from Prison” is a collection of poems written by Soyinka during his years of imprisonment. These poems bring forth the nightmares experienced and felt by him during this period.

Nigeria - The Country and its Ethnic groups



1.2 NIGERIA, NIGERIAN DRAMA AND THE YORUBA

Nigeria is a country situated in Western Africa, bordering the Gulf of Guinea between Benin and Cameroon. The country boasts of mountains in the southeast and plains in the west. The climate varies that is; it is equatorial in the south, tropical in the center and arid in the north.

Nigeria has a vast range of natural resources like natural gas, petroleum, tin, iron ore, columbite, coal, limestone, lead, zinc and arable land. It is the most populous country in Africa and is composed of more than two hundred and fifty ethnic groups. Among them, the most populous and politically influential groups are; Hausa, Fulani, Yoruba, Igbo, Ijaw, Kanuri, Ibibio and Tiv.

A tragic fact about Nigeria is that political instability, military regime, corruption, and civil wars had hobbled it for a long period. It had been under military rule for a period of sixteen years and eventually, in 1999, it came under civilian rule. The history of Nigeria is definitely not a pleasant one as there has been a lot of bloodshed amongst the hue and cry for independence. Today, Nigeria is recovering from its past horrors and is moving ahead with a peaceful transition under civilian government.

Development of Nigerian Drama

Drama seeks to apprehend the truth of the universe and catch the decisive phase of social development in an immediate, spontaneous and effective manner in a way that the novel and poem cannot. In other words, drama as an instrument of group dynamics and mass psychology creates a spontaneous interaction among the audience. Thus, it can be employed as an ideological tool to reinforce and legitimize the value of the dominant group in the society. It can also be used as an enlightenment forum through which social awareness is promoted. Indeed, understanding drama and the nature of its appeal from the Marxist standpoint means bringing into sharp focus, imaginatively, the specific character of social relations which activate the struggle between the ruling class and the ruled, between capital and labour and between the oppressor and the oppressed. The use of the dramatic medium as a means of propagating ideologies and the struggles for the control of the conscience of man has been noted by writers like Ngugi Wa Thiong'o for example, who see drama as one of the most potent media in the struggle against cultural and neo-colonialism in Africa. It is also a decisive weapon of galvanizing the masses towards radical socio-economic

changes. This is attested to by the phenomenal success of his play "Ngahika Ndeeda," particularly the dust it raised between the Kenyan folks and the government when it was performed.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Lagos, a theatre tradition developed featuring well-known English and European musicals, concerts and operas. The actors, concert groups and clientele of the foreign tradition were the new, Westernized elite. The artists featured included Handel and Mozart. Similar concert groups were set up in Ibadan and Abeokuta. Soon, there was a clamor for works based on indigenous Nigerian subject matter, and one D. O. Oyedele is said to have written a play entitled "King Elejigbo" (1904) in response to the call. The play cannot now be traced, but there are references to it in the Lagos theatre reviews of the period. This theatre tradition did not last beyond the first decade of the twentieth century. Politics was already in the air in Lagos and in other parts of Nigeria, and many of the leading spirits behind the Lagos Theatre Movement, like Herbert Macaulay, soon found politics more attractive than the theatre.

For about forty years after the play "King Eiejigbo," there was no notable development in the Nigerian Theatre until Hubert Ogunde came to the scene in 1944. Hubert Ogunde, who wrote both in English and in

Yoruba, more than any one else, created the awareness of the modern theatre tradition in Nigeria. His was an operative travelling theatre, and he took his plays to various parts of the country, and also to other West African countries, particularly Ghana and Sierra Leone, for about forty years.

Ogunde's plays have religious, social and political themes and titles such as "Garden of Eden," "Nebuchadnezzar's Fieign," "Herbert Macaulay," "Journey to Heaven," "Tiger's Empire," "Strike and Hunger" and "Yoruba Ponu (Yoruba rethink)." Occasionally, he came into confrontation with the political authorities and had his plays were banned.

Hubert Ogunde was professionally remarkable in another sense. Early in his theatre career, he confronted the problem of the frequent resignation and departure of his actresses, especially as soon as they got married and their husbands objected to their wives continuing as actresses because of the stigma attached. Ogunde then solved this problem in a practical way by marrying virtually all his actresses. This stabilized his performing company such that he often had too many actresses and sometimes made some of the women to perform male roles. Ogunde was the first professional theatre man in Nigeria who lived

entirely by the art and, indeed, for it.

Ogunde had many followers and imitators, and there is now a flourishing art of the popular theatre. Biodun Jeyifo (1984) listed over a hundred such theatres in Yorubaland alone. They are popular with the masses because they use the local language, and their operatic mode (a balance of speech and music) endears them to the people. Indeed, the ordinary Nigerian is hardly aware of any other modern theatre form.

Apart from the popular travelling theatre of Ogunde and his followers, there is also literary drama, which is pre-dominantly anglophone, largely university-based, and elitists. One of the first practitioners of this mode was James Ene Henshaw. He wrote several plays including "This is Our Chance," "Children of the Goddess," "Medicine for Love," and "Dinner for Promotion."

These plays are commentaries on social and political life in Nigeria in the years just before and after independence. They treat issues of culture contact and conflict, of the problems of building a coherent nation out of diverse ethnic groups and of morality in social dealings. The plays were popular in schools and other literate circles in the 1960's and early 1970's, and were the first diet of many budding Nigerian playwrights.

By far, the dominant personality in Nigerian literary drama has

been the Nobel laureate, Wole Soyinka, who has been in active theatre, both inside and outside Nigeria, since the late 1950's. He produced and published many plays.

Early in his artistic career, he established the Orisun Theatre Company and the 1960 Masks from which literally flowed a stream of truly remarkable plays. As mentioned earlier, he has a background that includes the University of Leeds and the Royal Court Theatre in London, university jobs in Lagos, Ibadan and Ife and reasonably well-equipped theatres in Ibadan and Ife. Thus, Soyinka was well prepared for an outstanding career as a playwright and theatre-practitioner.

Soyinka has tended to write two types of plays; first, the relatively easily comprehensible play in which he is dealing with a single issue or a limited number of issues in plain language; and second, the more ambitious, full-length play in which he is dealing with a wide array of issues in complex language, often loaded with abstruse imagery and symbolism, and for which he has acquired the reputation of being a difficult writer. The easier plays include "The Lion and the Jewel," "The Jero Plays," "Childe Internationale," "Kongi's Harvest" and "A Play of Giants," while the more abstruse ones include "The Road," "The Strong Breed," "Madmen and Specialists" and "Death and the King's

Horseman.”

In content also, Soyinka has tended to write two types of plays, viz. the political play and the social play. In the political plays, Soyinka exposes the bizarre, insensitive and bestial nature of governance in contemporary Africa. In the social or metaphysical plays, he explores, often in a satirical vein, issues like prejudices, religious hypocrisy, and futurology, or he probes the nature of sacrifices, conflict, the transition from life to death, and the inscrutable supernatural forces which control the universe.

John Pepper Clark is another important playwright. He has published seven plays, namely, “Songs of a Goat,” “The Masquerade,” “The Raft,” “Ozidi,” “The Boat,” “The Return Home,” and “Full Circle.” The first four belong to the 1960’s, and the last three to the 1980’s. As in his poetry, Clark's setting is the Ijaw Delta environment, and his universe is one of storm and tide, of sandbars, boat capsizes and drowning, and the human tragedy enacted therein. The plays, with the exception of “Ozidi” which is Shakespearean, have Greek models and seem organized into two sets of trilogies.

Ola Rotimi, who started his writing career in 1966, has been a well-rounded theatre man and a first rate play director. He has published

about six plays, namely, "The Gods Are not to Blame," "Kurunmi," "Ovonramwen Nogbaisi," "Our Husband has Gone Again", "If," and "Hoiding Talks". Rotimi's major pre-occupation in his plays is with history conceived as tragedy either in metaphoric or in plain expository terms. "The Gods are not to Blame," for example, is a Nigerian adaptation of the 'Oedipus theme' in which Rotimi uses the metaphor of communal dispute, self-love and ethnic pride to symbolize the problems that culminated in the Nigerian Civil War of 1967-70. Thus, it is not the gods who are to blame for Nigeria's national tragedy, but the people themselves who led their nation to disaster through their incautious actions and aggressive self-interest. In "Kurunmi" and "Ovonramwen Nogbaisi," the message is even less ambiguous: it is the case of a people who plunge themselves into tragedy either because of the excesses of their leader or the limited visions of the people themselves. There are several other playwrights who belong to this liberal-conservative ethos, notably Wale Ogunyemi and two women playwrights, Zulu Sofola and Tess Onwueme. Ogunyemi's landscape is similar to that of Ola Rotimi. His "Ijaiye War," for example, is earlier than and uses basically the same material as Rotimi draws on for his "Kurunmi." Ogunyemi has published many other plays, including "Eshu Elegbara," and "Obaluaye."

Zulu Sofola, the first Nigerian woman playwright, has been writing plays for over twenty years. Her titles include "Wedlock of the Gods" (1972), "King Emene" (1974) and "The Disturbed 'Peace of Christmas." Her forte is tragedy put in domestic or two ritual settings with human error, insensitivity or crime the as the tragic flaw.

By contrast, Tess Onwueme started writing in the early 1980's. Her plays include "A Hen Too Soon" (1983), "The Broken Calabash" (1984), "The Desert Encroaches" (1985), "The Reign of Wasobia" (1988) and "Legacies" (1989). Unlike Sofola, her vision is not predominantly about the past; rather she moves across temporal and cultural frontiers with relative ease.

In the late 1970's and the 1980's, a group of young people started expressing unease about the prevailing liberal-conservative ethos in the Nigerian theatre. They were mostly erstwhile disciples or admirers of Soyinka, but who were no longer fully satisfied with his vision of society. While still paying respect to his great artistic skill, they suggested that he was not giving the adequate leadership in his plays about what the people ought to do to alleviate their social and political problems. With varying degrees of sophistication, they expressed their desire to see the theatre in the vanguard of the search for solutions to society's problems and as a

propaganda machine designed to achieve this purpose. Some of the prominent names in this socialist alternative are Femi Osofisan, Bode Sowande, Tunde Fatunde, Olu Obafemi and Kola Ornotoso.

Osofisan has published more than eleven plays, the most important of which are "The Chattering and the Song" (1977), "Who is Afraid of Solarin?" (1978), "Once Upon Four Robbers" (1980) and "Morountodun" (1982). Bode Sowande's plays include "The Night Before," "Farewell to Babylon" and "A Sanctus for Women" (1979). Fatunde has "No More Oil Boom" (1985), "Blood and Sweat" (1985), "No Food, No Country," (1985) and "Oga Na Tief Man" (1986).

Obafemi's publications include three short plays: "Night of the Mystical Beast" (1986), "The New Dawn" (1986), and "Suicide Syndrome" (1988). And Omotosho has the play "The Curse" (1976). All the plays in various ways protect the socialist vision of the Nigerian society. At its most competent, for example in Osofisan's plays, the vision is realized through carefully woven plots mediated by limit-credible characters and situations. Some of the playwrights, however, give the impression that their works have been hurriedly put together to catch the moment. Such plays are little more than topical social and political tracts with only a thin veneer of fiction.

From ideological points of view, socio-economic and political commitment and relevance, critics have categorized Nigerian Playwrights into two - the first or conservative generation and the second or radical generation. Thus James Ene Henshaw, Wole Soyinka, J.P. Clark, Wale Ogunyemi, Zulu Sofola and Ola Rotimi have often been described as belonging to the first generation, not necessarily because of their age but because of their artistic vision and practice. Certain predilections towards complacency about social situation, indifference to the problems of the poor and the underprivileged masses, stylistic classicism and predominantly pessimistic view of life have been identified to characterize their works. The contribution of the first generation playwrights to the development of Modern Nigerian Drama is epitomized in the works of Wole Soyinka much of whose creative output has been a source of inspiration to many of his compatriots.

Oyin Ogunba, Joel Adedeji, E. D. Jones, and other critics variously acknowledge the traditional elements in the play of Wole Soyinka. Indeed, an evaluation of Soyinka's major plays reveals that traditional Yoruba beliefs, mythology, history and folkways constitute the source and background of these plays. The traditional elements are artistically blended with his knowledge of the literary drama of the classical and

modern European writers.

Many critics of Marxist learning are quite unsparing in their criticism of the ideological slants of Soyinka. They claim that Soyinka's society looks for saviours that never come and that his purported saviour is usually conceived in the light of the traditional "scape-goat" who is expected to carry away the sin of the society through ritual death. This, in the assessment of Marxist critics, is totalistic, retrogressive and politically suicidal. Many of Wole Soyinka's-play therefore, fall short of the ideological expectation of the new generation writers and critics who had the view that the task of the artist is to rouse the people from and not to join the general despair of the society. Even Osofisan asserts that he wrote "No More The Wasted Breed" as a counter myth to debunk the mysticism created by religious acolytes about gods and their relationship with men in the world of "The Strong Breed."

The criticism made against the first generation playwrights is even more relevant when one considers the plays of J. P. Clark and the early plays of Ola Rotimi who model their plays after the Greek tragic epistemic. Be they Zifa, Ebiere or Tonye in "Song of a Goat"; Tufa or Titi in "The Masquerade"; Ogoro, Kengide or Olotu in "The Raft," the characters are influenced not by their conscious efforts or will but by

their "Teme" or individual's fate.

The early plays of Ola Rotimi, especially "The Gods Are Not to Blame," which itself is an adaptation of Sophocle's "Oedipus Rex" echoes some preoccupation with the supernatural similar to the plays of J.P. Clark. Ola Rotimi, with Aristotle's conception of a tragic hero builds his tragedies, often round such public figures as kings and war-lords, ignoring the crucial role of and the plight of the common people in the society. This tragic mould, from an elitist and individual's heroic point of view goes against the grain of first generation playwrights who advocate for social heroes in their work.

The post civil-war period in Nigeria witnessed the emergence of a new group of playwrights, sometimes referred to as "the second generation playwrights" set apart from their compatriots not necessarily by age difference (where it does exist at all) but by temperament and ideological view point. These playwrights often express their dismay about the literary preoccupation of the first generation by proffering in their works a new vision of the society. Prominent among these writers are; Femi Osofisan, Bode Sowande, Olu Obafemi, Tunde Fatunde and Laolu Oguniyi. Their ideological leaning is positively skewed towards the socialist cause. As far as they are concerned, man's problems

originate from man himself and not from any metaphysical realm or gods, and only man can, by himself find solution to these problems.

These playwrights are no longer satisfied with the art-for-art-sake slogan. Instead, they reckon on art particularly drama as a relevant instrument of social mobilization. For the group, drama must be functional in terms of arousing the consciousness of the masses in order to effect a change for a better society through collective action. In other words, the new generation playwrights perceive drama as a strong ideological weapon, which can be used to create the kind of awareness, which may lead to change in the society. It is a potent ideological tool for liberating the oppressed masses. This point of view is affirmed by the various interviews Osofisan held with critics in "Excursion in Drama and Literature" (1993).

The new generation playwrights therefore, ignore the conventional classical drama of cathartic purgation and concentrate instead on realistic drama - a drama of social relevance that strives to analyze and procure solutions to social problems. The playwrights in this group often draw materials from historical, mythic, legendary and contemporary events to show how the emergent national bourgeoisie's in contemporary society exploits the masses.

While Osofisan, for example admires the technical artistic accomplishment of his predecessors such as Wole Soyinka, Ola Rotimi and J.P. Clark, he is still convinced that their works are not immediately relevant to the people. He argues often at times that many members of the first generation Nigerian writers are guilty of creating an escapist literature - a literature which fails to address the reality of social system and grapple in meaningful ways with the solutions to the inherent problems prevalent in such societies.

He believes that myth and the mythic material should be reshaped and reconstructed in such a way as to expose the oppressive and exploitative tendencies inherent in their making and, by so doing demythologize and de-mystify them. It is this desire to rescue the theatre from its current state of lethargy and pessimism, which informs the visionary charge in his plays. For example, his play "No More The Wasted Breed" does not only question the rationale of exploitation of man in the name of religion or "god" but rejects institutionalized religion and rituals as avenue to social salvation. The salvation of the society in Osofisan's view lies in the hand of the living man and not in the hands of he that hanged on a tree or drowned in the sea. This contrasts with and offers a respite from prevailing fatalism epitomized by Soyinka's "The

Strong Breed.”

The central foci of the various conflicts in the plays of the second generation playwrights in Nigeria can be said to border on class-struggle. The prescriptive weapons of class-struggle include: educating the naive, underprivileged in the society, as exemplified in Altine's "Wrath," undertaking some diplomatic moves towards resolving social conflicts; and where necessary, taking up the arms in the struggle to liberate the society, as typified by the incidents in "Morountodun," "The Chatering and The Song" and "Red is the Freedom Road"; and overhauling or conditioning of the mind of the folks along some ideological line in order to change the existing social conceptions and values as preferred in "No More The Wasted Breed." Other younger writers in Universities and Colleges of Education are beginning to pattern their plays along the radical dispensation and this trend has extended far beyond the year 2000.

There is no doubt that Modern Nigeria drama has been heavily influenced by European dramatic conventions. Virtually all the Nigeria playwrights have learned their crafts from the West and virtually all have adapted the acquired artistic skills to suit the African socio-cultural milieu. At the moment, Bertolt Brecht's dramatic technique of epic

dimension is beginning to gain ground in Nigerian dramatic scenes. Like Bertolt Brecht, the New Generation Writers do not take kindly to the "dramatic theatre", a theatre which actually promotes the creation of illusory world into which the audience is lured as if by magic-spell; a theatre which tends to sedate the audience rather than simulate rational thinking. As antithesis to the Cathartic drama, the Epic Theatre evolves attempts to dispel illusion and mystification by reducing uncritical empathy. The process of demystifying theatrical illusion in order to arouse a questioning doubt and radical consciousness in the audience is what Brecht called (at various times) "the Alienation Effect" the "Distancing Effect" the "Estrangement Effect" or "Verfremdungs Effect".

Specifically, the alienation is achieved through such devices as story telling or narration, role-playing and role reversal while employing reasoned argument. The summation of these devices is that an actor consciously enters the role of someone-else in order to tell or retell a story about human life dispassionately while the audience is challenged to evaluate or rationalize the situation. In the process, the audience is exposed to constant disruption of the narrative as the actors frequently abandon speech for song, or take on or off "masks" or even swap roles to take part in another "play" within the larger dramatic frame. Scenes are

thus shifted abruptly in time and space in the fashion of the "montage".

Again citation from the plays of Femi Osofisan becomes relevant here because he is the pioneer who is set to lead the crop of the new generation of Nigerian playwrights into the new millennium and beyond. In "Morontodun" for example Osofisan adopts the "Agit Prop" version of dramatic exposition and in doing so the audience is faced with the task of sifting between the "Actors Proper" and some members of the participating audience. The Director, at the beginning of the play instructs the actors and turns round to address the audience. During this process, he is intermittently interrupted by the noises of the agitators, which fade in and out until finally he is displaced by the near hysteria of the mob, which surges in with placards and handbills to occupy the stage. This movement is accompanied by drummers in frenzied mood and the whole theatre is filled with action as actors intermingle with the audience, distributing handbills.

Osofisan's actors usually make the audience aware that they are changing to re-enact the roles of the characters in the "story" being performed. They do this either through dialogues or through the changing of costumes, at times, under the glaring eyes of the audience. For example, in the playlet within the play in "The Chattering And The

Song,” Mokañ slips into the role of Aresa, Leje becomes Latoye, Sontri, Alaafin, Abiodun, Funlola, and Olori. This playlet is so technically interwoven with the main play that it takes a fast thinking audience to detect when, in actual fact, the actors are role-playing and when they are back to their original cast. For example, at the end of the playlet, Leje, Funlola, Bisi and Yetunde "stop acting" and watch Mokañ in amazement as he defiles the convention and keeps on kicking Alaafin (Sontri) savagely. Here, we see Mokañ not just as Aresa whose role he is supposed to be playing but also as a secret police working to arrest the leader of the farmers movement as well as an avenger of a thwarted love.

Through the Dire or in "Morontodun," Osofinsan constantly cautions his audience to suspend their beliefs. At the end of the play he addresses the audience, thus throwing light on another way of realizing the alienation effect in drama.

"You must not imagine that what we have presented here tonight was the truth. This is a theatre, don't forget a house of dreams and phantom struggles... We are actors and whatever we present here is mere artifice, assembled for your entertainment." ¹¹

Without doubt, Osofisan must have been influenced by the dramatic technique in "Woza Albert!" and "Sizwe Bansi is Dead" in

crafting "The Oriki of a Grasshopper" as far as the paucity of character and multiple role of the actors are concerned. However while "Woza Albert!" is loosely structured and quite episodic, "The Oriki of a Grasshopper," though not linear in structure is much more unified along a specific story-line. Also, while the attacks in "Woza Albert!" are snappy, wispy and inferentially latent, those of "The Oriki of a Grasshopper" are more direct and concrete although, equally wispy. Songs, music and dance constitute prominent features in the plays of Femi Osofisan. They are used not just for entertainment but also as "emotion-checker" and as commentary on the on-going action and the prevailing social situation. In other words, the band, the orchestra and the various singers provide oblique comments on the experience of the plays in a manner reminiscent of the chorus in classical Greek drama. They also give the various character opportunity to criticize even their very roles and perception, thus creating some "alienation effect".

Several critics have contributed to the debate on what makes language of literature different from other discourse materials. The general consensus seems to focus on the preponderance of imaginative and creative expressions in the corpus of the former as compared to the latter. It is this characteristic which makes critics see literature, drama in

particular as creative language.

Expressive discourse in literary works is a matter of style and style often is used to refer to the manner of expression. Many kinds of distinction may be made. These include "florid", "simple", "realistic", "symbolic", "extravagant", "prosaic", "elevated", "formal and conventional" or "peculiar and innovative" ways of expression.

Chinweizu (et al 1980) are so much concerned with lucid communication in works of literature that their attack on some first generation writers in "Toward the Decolonization of African Literature" is unsparing. In it, the troika describes the writing of "older poets" as old fashioned, craggy, unmusical language, with obscure, inaccessible diction... a plethora of imported imagery; divorce from the vibrancy of African oral tradition, and tempered by lifeless attempt at revivalism.

Harsh and perhaps caustic as this criticism may be, it has, nevertheless contributed immensely towards new orientation in language use in African literature. Two writers - Niyi Osundare and Femi Osofisan immediately come to mind as far as the Nigerian situation is concerned. The linguistic territory of both writers, their wit and humour are derived basically from the African (indeed Yoruba) experience. The images, the metaphoric manipulation of words and twist of phrases are not just

original, clear and refreshing, they are penetratingly incisive and exciting. Besides, the language is devoid of any privatism or obscurantism shade.

The issue of creative use of language, in my mind should be a subject of concern, a challenge to writers and critics of drama. The writer should not merely exhibit a flexibility of language through a variety of expressive media, he should also attempt to achieve a distinctive system of signification through fore-grounding, punning, parabolism, proverbial expression, even code mixing and code switching. The following expressive reservation by Charles Ennolim sums up the unfortunate situation in the criticism of African literature: "In Toward the Decolonization of African Literature," everything is wrong with our poetry, our novels and our criticism is ferreted out and catalogued, often with most caustic comments ... But in the end, Literature with all its brilliance Toward the decolonization of African Literature leaves us empty ... Every poem, every novel, every critical essay worth its salt is examined by the troika and equally condemned."¹²

Ennolim concludes that all things considered, the book is no more than "a carefully sequenced and high series of brilliant blackmail" thus expressing his dismay for the critics who "went with bulldozers on demolition campaign of literary edifices with no plans for positive

reconstruction”.

Elsewhere, Ngugi Wa Thiongo. Niyi Oshundare. Femi Osofisan and E.D. Jones have variously criticized the works of writers like Wole Soyinka, Ola Rotimi and others from the point of view of commitment, conservatism and relevance to the society, somewhat ignoring literary quality of their works. Obviously, the comments of some critics negate the broad perspectives of literary essence and do little or no justice to the total appreciation of given texts. Moreover some critics are equally guilty of the offence for which they accuse writers. For instance white critics blame the first generation playwrights for not facing the reality of the contemporary situation, they fall short of reality in their own works, for their prescriptive revolutionary approach to the liberation issue is often too fantastic and too simplistic to be true to life. Again typical example can be found in Femi Osofisan's various liberation movements in “Red is the Freedom Road” “Morountodun” and “The Chattering and the Song.”

The tragic dimension in “Another Raft” calls for a revisit of Osofisan's ideological stance, especially his unsparing criticism of Wole Soyinka's tragic dimension in “The Strong Breed.” In an attempt to placate the gods and usher in a period of peace and prosperity in the community, “the chosen group” sets out on a hazardous journey on a raft.

In the process, all except three die in succession. First, Gbebe stabs his father to death! Ekuoola and Lanusen are thrown into the river by the storm; Waje dives into the water later followed by Agunrin on a rescue mission, but they are all attacked and devoured by sharks, and as a result of some bad omens, Gbebe commits suicide by plunging into the water to be devoured by sharks!.

It doesn't matter whether we perceive the dramatic events as allegorical and symbolic or affirm (as is naturally the case) that destruction is the inevitable outcome of rancour and disunity in a nation, the conclusion that "Another Raft" is a tragic play in which lives are needlessly terminated by social and natural forces can hardly be left out. It must be said therefore that Osofisan in "Another Raft" is, to some extent, equally pessimistic and fatalistic as, Wole Soyinka is in "The Strong Breed."

It is not per chance that I have concentrated on "academic drama" especially plays written to be read and performed by educational institutions. This choice is deliberate, more so that such plays often form the guard fly, the main reference point by which the dramatic traditions of a nation are documented, appreciated and applied for educational purpose. I am of course, aware of the numerous television drama

programmes and in recent time the craze for home video films. It is sufficient enough to say that the Nigerian dramatic scene is very virile and 'green'. It is growing in bounds and it is hoped that as time goes by, the hardliners of Marxist critics will learn to be more accommodating and less caustic in their assessment of literary works.

Yoruba Theatre

The Yoruba Popular theatre, to date one of the most popular genres in an African language on the continent, emerged from Protestant churches. Not the official churches, but the African churches which had broken with the Anglican or Methodist mother churches, among them, the Cherubim and Seraphim churches. They had since 1930 felt a need to give a more scared character to their worship by mounting theatrical pieces of Adam and Eve, Joseph and his brothers. Ulli Beier was present around the 50's at a performance of the play of Adam and Eve where the main characters 'dressed in swimming trunks, went into obscene remarks on their nudity.'¹³ These dramatic pieces made a skillful use of Yoruba language, which by its tonal structure lends itself to chanted diction.

Hubert Ogunde was the first to secularize religious themes in the popular Yoruba theatre in his play titled "Concert Party." He was banned in 1945 by the colonial government for showing a play "Hunger and Strike," denouncing the miserable condition of Nigerian workers and supporting the general strike. He had a similar experience in 1964 with "Yoruba Ronu" (Let the Yoruba Think), where he criticized the new rulers of Western Nigeria. The government banned it in the region. The military coup d'etat of 1966 allowed him to come back and his play achieved a large popular success. This Yoruba opera drew a large public and seems to be a very popular form of theatre if we judge by the number of companies which have been formed in Western Nigeria since independence.

Kola Ogunmola and the Travelling Theatre tried to present a theatre more serious than the satires mixed with the farce which made the success of Hubert Ogunde. The first play of Kola Ogunmola, "Love of Money," recounts the adventures of a rich and happy husband who allows himself to be led into marrying, as a second wife, an intriguing woman who thinks only of stealing from him and who leaves him, poor and ruined. Kola Ogunmola also adapted for the stage several novels of

D.O.Fagunwa, the great Yoruba novelist, just as he had "The Palmwine Drunkard." This Yoruba adaptation of a novel written in English gave to the book, which had not been well received by the Nigerian elite and intelligentsia, a new wash of popularity and made it undoubtedly accessible to a larger public.

The latest arrival in the Yoruba theatre is Duro Ladipo who is, without doubt, a better musician than his predecessors. It is in-fact relatively easy to exploit the tonal resources of Yoruba and to dispense with writing music adapted to the text. Duro Ladipo, a teacher until 1962, renounced the facilities of highlife¹⁴ for the riches of traditional Yoruban instruments: especially the drums. This return to a more traditional culture is accompanied by a choice of historical subjects: Duro Ladipo performs the stories of Yoruba kings and gods. "Oba Moro," (the king captures the devil), presented for the first time in 1962, brings on stage the Oyo king in a dispute with his advisors. "Obo Koso," (the king does not hang), presents Sango, the third king of Oyo, brought down by the generals who he himself, by his ambition, pushed into war, abandoned by his wife, driven to exile and to death by hanging. He is still, in spite of that deified after his death as Sango, the god of thunder and

paradoxically, the 'king who does not hang.'

The last play of Duro Ladipo, "Oba Waja" (the king is dead) has a modern theme, based on a real incident which happened in 1946. On the death of the Oyo king, the commander of his horses should have died also. He is prevented from doing so by the British administrator, to the great shame of the people of Oyo, and of his own son. The latter, a trader commits suicide in the face of the dignity of his father, who then is left with no other recourse but to commit suicide in his turn. This tragedy can be attributed to Eshu, the spirit of evil who takes pleasure in confusing men.

Duro Ladipo's art has gone beyond the boundaries of Nigeria: he received an enthusiastic welcome at the festival of Berlin in 1964. The popular theatre movement seemed in 1946 to gain amplitude with the appearance of new authors.

This movement is unique in contemporary Africa both by its breadth and the quality of production. In Nigeria, a group of ten million people spoke Yoruba and the effect has been remarkable. Especially as, in addition, ever since the middle of the previous century, the missions had entered first Lagos, then Abeokuta, and a system of Latin transcription of Yoruba had been developed from this period. Western

Nigeria, thanks to the rapid penetration of the missions and the implantation of large urban centres, has known a development in education and in the formation of westernized elite much faster than the rest of Nigeria.

Social and political satire, morality, these were the first themes of Yoruba Opera. This is because the possibility of using ritual dramas or spectacular elements of Yoruba culture presents a difficult problem of interpretation and transformation in a different language. On which elements should one insist in order not to give the impression that one is celebrating a past with which the Nigerian elite who form an important part of the audience, wish to break? Duro Ladipo chose to emphasize the eternal elements present in ritual schemes: the presence of evil in history, the failure of Sango, the ruse of Eshu. Destiny is responsible for man's misfortunes.

Fatalistic with Duro Ladipo, moralistic or fantastic with Kola Ogunmola, satirical with Hubert Ogunde, the Yoruba popular theatre is an original form of art whose influence on Nigerian literature cannot be underestimated.¹⁵

Yoruba Tribe

Among the various tribes mentioned in Nigeria, one of interest is the Yoruba tribe. This is for the basic reason that Wole Soyinka belongs to this tribe and more importantly; Soyinka's plays revolve round the ways of this tribe. Therefore, for a better understanding of his plays, it is necessary to acquaint ourselves with this tribe.

The Yoruba tribe is one of the three largest ethnic groups of Nigeria. They are approximately twelve million in number and inhabit the southwestern Nigeria and the Republic of Benin in southeastern and central Dahomey.

The origin of the Yoruba tribe cannot be clearly deciphered. It is believed that their primary descendants came from Egypt and were the Oduduwa.¹⁶ This assumption is based on the resemblance of sculptures found in Egypt and the sculptures found in the mythological center of Yoruban life, in the city of Ife. According to their myths, their founders were the sons of Oduduwa. The Yoruba still refer to themselves as "the children of Oduduwa." When he died, his property was divided up among his seven sons, and the tribe grew in after a period of wars. Even though

they had a common origin, religion, and culture they never combined into a single political organization.

The myth of the origin of the Yoruba tribe is interesting. It goes like this: Oshanala, god of white and creativity was given a iron chain, some earth in a snail shell, a five toed chicken, and a chameleon by Olodudmare, the creator. Out of that he told him to climb down the chain and create earth. As he walked toward the gate of heaven, he saw some people having a party. They offered him some wine. He drank too much and fell asleep. Oduduwa, Oshanala's younger brother had heard the instructions. When he saw his brother sleeping, he took the things and went to the edge of heaven and let the chain down. He put the earth on the water and placed the five toed chicken upon it. The chicken scratched the earth in all directions. Then Oduduwa placed the chameleon on the earth to test its strength. When it was finished, he stepped upon the earth and made his home there. This myth does not explain how the Yoruba came into being. It rather explains their customs and beliefs on creation. The Yoruba myths bring a sense of unity to the people of their tribe, although all the kings or obas as they are called, claim to be descendants of Oduduwa.

Most Yorubas raise yam and corn as their staple crops. In addition,

A Eugungun Mask:
Part of Yoruba Handicraft



they produce about ninety percent cocoa for the country. Other men work as traders or craftsmen and their economy centers around agriculture, trading and handicrafts. They have developed a variety of different artistic forms like metalwork, beadwork, weaving and pottery. However, the Yoruba women do not work. They attain their social status by their role in the market system rather than on their husband's economic status.

The Yoruba are famous for their art and craftwork. Their wood sculpture has remained important up to modern times. Everything in this society was carved. Their doors, drums, and ritual masks are made of wood. The doors were often covered with carved panels of scenes of everyday life, history, or mythology. Even the hinge posts were carved with figures like that of a Totem pole. Their masks are simple facial carvings that represent different types of Yoruban religious people like the trader, the servant, and the seducer.

Most Yoruba towns were either farm oriented or were located on the crossroads of trade routes where traders stopped to rest. In most towns the market place is usually located in front of the king's palace which is in the center of the town. The towns were founded by the Baale (father of the land), who in turn was named king. He was the religious and political leader of the town. It was the king's job to name the chiefs;

Otun, the "right hand man", and Balogun, "the War Chief." The king was considered a sacred person, like a living god. He could not be seen or spoken too directly. He also could not eat in public. He did not die, instead he simply passed on his crown to another Yoruba.

Many of the Yoruba are now either Christian or Muslim, but some have held on to their traditional religious beliefs. In the religion of the Yoruba, continuity can be seen between the divinities, the kings, and the ancestors. There are two major gods who have human forms. Oduduwa, reigned at Ife, and Shango at Oyo. Shango, the god of thunder, is referred to in many of Wole Soyinka's poem's and play's, like "The Lion and the Jewel." Many other gods hold high places in Yoruba religion like Olokun, god of the sea, Shokpona, god of the earth, Oko, god of agriculture, and Ogun, god of war. Two other divinities are important parts of the religion. Ishu, the messenger of the god's, and Fa or Fate, the "hidden companion" of god's and men, hold high places in Yoruban religion.

The Yoruba people have a lot of different customs of burial and death than Americans. For example, a child who dies is considered an *abiku*, meaning "one born only to die." The baby, or child, is buried immediately without being bathed, shaved, or dressed. The elders'

funerals have hundreds of younger guests and a festive mood dominates. According to them, one should celebrate an elder who has had many children and has lived to a ripe age.

Among the birth customs, when a child is born, it is sprinkled with water until it cries. The parents are not supposed to speak until the child cries. In addition, on hearing the child cry, the father drops money into a dish and says the name of the child. Other relatives drop money in the dish as well suggesting the names that they want the child to be given.

Another interesting fact about the Yoruba is that they are the majority of people who give birth to twins in the world. Furthermore, if one of the twins dies, the mother makes a statue of the twin who died and dresses and feeds it.

The Yorubas are some of the best-educated people in Nigeria. Many have become doctors, lawyers, poets, and writers. The Yoruba also established the great city of Ibadan, considered the capital of the Yoruba people and the seat of their ancient splendor. An interesting fact about the Yorubas is that many Yorubas bear three or four scars on each side of their face. These marks help identify the Yoruba tribe or ethnic group to which they belong.

Today however, the Yoruba society has become materialistic and

people are judged by their wealth, whether they have achieved it through education or less commendable means. The 'ordinary people' cannot achieve such wealth and this has led to corruption. The solution for many young people is to go abroad. This has caused the gradual erosion of the quality and culture of the Yoruba.

1.3

Aims and Approaches

In this research, I have undertaken five dramas written by Wole Soyinka. My main aim is to bring out the cultural clash portrayed in the plays. As mentioned in the earlier part of the research, Soyinka belongs to the Yoruba tribe himself. Therefore, quite naturally, he is well versed with his own traditional ways and means. It was during his childhood that the British took his country under their rule. Obviously, foreign rule in the land introduced new ideas. Soyinka saw through his very own eyes the transition that his country was going through. It is this transition, this phase that he very often describes in his plays.

I personally feel that not much research has been done on the cultural clash portrayed by Soyinka. There have been people who have referred to the topic. However, what they have described, is in my opinion, just the tip of the iceberg. For example, Ademola Oluremi Bello did a research about the Yoruba race whereas, Roger Westcott, who is presently Professor Emeritus at Drew University did a research on the meaning behind African names in Nigeria. Gregory Gipson has done an in-depth analysis on the post-colonial aspect in Soyinka's works whereas, Isobel Grundy, Tory Professor (B.A,

DphilOxford), has presented the biography of Soyinka. Therefore, a research on cultural clash is not only interesting but challenging as well.

I intend to bring out in this research, the essence of African culture and more particularly, the Yoruba culture. In addition, I also wish to highlight the irony of progress, which happens to be a major reason for the cultural clash presented in Soyinka's plays.

The two cultures; viz. European and Yoruba, happen to co-exist in a native land namely; Nigeria. And between them, there is an undercurrent of tension and confusion which the alien culture, that is, the European culture happens to thrust upon the land. European notions, thoughts, ideas and ways of life are introduced in a land which is not legally their own.

One might think that Soyinka is trying to remind us that the British came to Africa with technologies and forces that traditional African cultures could not hope to resist; in other words, that he is reminding us of his people's status as victims. That would be a misreading. The British did indeed bring superior physical force to Nigeria; but Soyinka is more concerned to point out that the spiritual and cultural forces that the Yoruba relied upon were far more superior and far more impressive. Those traditions themselves, Soyinka is always eager to point out, have

enormous power. When rightfully used and respectfully employed, they can overcome the humiliations inflicted upon the Yoruba by British imperialism.

Soyinka who speaks in these works is concerned, as was T.S. Eliot, with the "dissociation of sensibility," with the fragmenting of a culture and thus the minds that inhabit it. He wants unity and wholeness. And this can only be achieved within the context of a particular and ethnic tradition; that is for him, within the Yoruba tradition. Furthermore, the Yoruba tradition can only flourish again only if its competitors are permanently removed from the cultural space of Nigeria.

It is this factor that Soyinka has clearly brought to notice in his dramas. And this is what I have tried to bring out in my research. Soyinka points out that Yoruba tradition is an integral part of Nigeria whereas European culture does not belong to Nigeria and its people at all.

His dramas are concerned with the collusion of foreign commercial interests in the undermining of Africa's progress, as well as with the religious and ethnic animosities among Nigerian people, which members of British cynical and rapacious elite periodically ignite into violent pogroms to serve their own selfish ends. He is talking, in one word, of the immense difficulties inherent in the creation of a Nation and of a

National identity.

He has projected in his dramas, the identity crisis in a very matter-of-fact manner. His dramas reflect the trauma and the confusion of the cultural clash, which his people are still encountering. I have tried in this research to bring out the clash of cultures, treating the subject with utmost care, free of prejudice or bias. I do not intend to make the European culture a scapegoat and demean it. On the other hand, I wish to bring to light how something alien appeals to the senses of those who have never come face to face with anything new in their lives. How people give up what they and their ancestors have been following for ages, for the unknown, the new. In the same tone, I wish to add that although I have undertaken only Soyinka's dramas for the purpose of my research, the problem faced by his people is similar to what we, the people of India are going through. Newfound ways and mannerisms are eroding the ethnic Indian culture. It is ironic because, the owners of European culture are adapting to Indian culture while we seem to be giving up what is essentially our own for something which never was and never will be ours.

1.4

Schematic Description

In the first chapter, which happens to be the Introduction, I have discussed Wole Soyinka's background and taken into account his various modes of writing. That is to say, his novels, poetry, criticism and his dramas have been discussed in brief.

Thereafter, I have gone onto giving a description of Nigeria and of the people that comprise it. I have given a vivid description of the development of Nigerian drama and particularly, the Yoruba Theatre. For a better understanding, I have also described the Yoruba tradition and their customs. Hereafter, I have described the aims and approaches of the research.

In the first part of the second chapter titled "The Lion and the Jewel," I will be giving the summary of the play and discussing the characterization. In the second portion, I will describe the cultural clash presented in the drama.

My third chapter, that is "Kongi's Harvest," will be treated in the same manner. That is to say, I will be giving a summary of the drama and an outlook of its characters. Thereafter, there will be an in-depth analysis of the cultural clash in the play, which will be dealt with in the second part of the chapter.

In "The Trials of Brother Jero," which will be my fourth chapter, I will be giving the background of the drama, its summary and its characterization. In the second part of the fourth chapter, the cultural clash will be discussed with respect to the characters involved. The fifth chapter titled "Jero's Metamorphosis" will be dealt with in the same manner as it is an appendage of "The Trials of Brother Jero."

"Madmen and Specialists" will happen to be the sixth chapter. In the first part of this chapter, the summary alongwith the characterization will be discussed. In the second part, the cultural clash will be taken into account.

Finally, the seventh chapter which will be titled "Conclusion" will be an insight to examine whether Soyinka has clearly brought to light the cultural clash prevalent in his dramas, in a comprehensive manner. I will discuss Soyinka's style of writing and point out Soyinka's position as a contemporary playwright. After the conclusion, Soyinka's bibliography will be put forth followed by works cited and works referred to.

Notes and references

¹ Eniola was a market woman who sold edible goods and owned her own shop. Wole fondly refers to her as Wild Christian in his book "Ake': The Years of Childhood" because of her mixed beliefs in Christianity and paganism.

² Abeokuta is a place in the town of Ake'.

³ "The Swamp Dwellers" was the first play written by Soyinka in 1958.

⁴ Anti-Communist.

⁵ General Abacha sentenced Soyinka to death therefore; his writings served as a proof that he was still alive.

⁶ Patrick Wilmot was a fellow academic of Soyinka and also an activist in Nigeria in 1980s.

⁷ Msika is a lecturer in English in Brickbeck College.

⁸ According to Leopold Senghor, Negritude is the African personality.

⁹ Soyinka wrote "Myth, Literature and the African World," in 1976.

¹⁰ Emerge is a famous critic who has highly appreciated the work of Soyinka.

¹¹ Femi Osofisan, "Morontodun," 1982, 79

¹² Charles Ennolim, "Ennolim" 1886, 27

¹³ Ulli Beier, "Introduction to African Literature," Ibadan, 1965, 245

¹⁴ West African popular music.

¹⁵ Perhaps a study of the audiences, which we have not been able to undertake, unfortunately, would reveal differences in composition, with those of Duro Ladipo and Kola Ogunmola coming more from the elite of Western Nigeria while Ogunde's would be more popular.

¹⁶ According to Yoruba mythology, Odudwa is the father of the Yoruba tribe.

"THE LION AND **THE JEWEL"**

Chapter 2: Study of "The Lion and the Jewel."

2.1 Brief summary of the drama and discussion of its characters.

This play is set in Ilunjile, a relatively remote village, which is under the guidance of its *bale*¹, Baroka. The chief characters of the play apart from Baroka are Lakunle, the village school teacher, Sidi, the village belle and Sadiku, the Bale's head wife. The drama is divided into three parts, viz. Morning, Noon and Night.

Some decades before the play is set, Baroka managed to have the railway line diverted so that it did not pass near the village end. He had however, made some concessions to change--- there is a school in the village and his palace staff has formed a union called the Worker's Union----- Baroka is still firmly in control. Also, shortly before the play begins, a photographer had come to the village with his "one-eyed box" and taken photographs of the village and of Sidi in particular.

In the first part, Lakunle is seen wooing Sidi. Lakunle is approximately twenty-three years of age and is dressed in an old fashioned English suit. Sidi is least interested in his advances as his thoughts and ideas are, according to her, a bit far-fetched. She considers

him a “madman.” The conversation is interrupted by the entry of a few girls who bring news that the photographer who had taken Sidi’s photographs some time ago has come back. They further show Sidi her photograph, which features on the cover page of a magazine. Sidi is thrilled beyond words as she feels that her picture resembles that of a goddess. She feels esteemed and privileged that her photograph is on the main cover while Baroka’s is in a small corner somewhere in the magazine. A feeling of pride engulfs her. She is the Jewel of Ilunjile. The first part ends when Baroka is admiring her picture and thinks of taking Sidi for his wife as it has been “full five months” (18) since he last took a wife.

The second part, which is titled Noon, begins with the entry of Sadiku. She acts as an in-between for Baroka bringing a message for Sidi that the Baroka wishes to take her for his wife. Sidi reprimands Baroka for thinking in this manner as he is sixty-two years of age and far too old to be her husband. She further feels that Baroka is thinking of taking her as his wife because her fame has exceeded that of Baroka and therefore, to satisfy his male ego he wishes to marry her. Sadiku is shocked that Sidi thinks in this manner and feels that Lakunle has misguided her. She

further continues with her suit stating that Baroka wishes to dine with her. Sidi flatly refuses to dine with him, as she is well aware of the stories of women who, after dining with him, either became his wife or his concubine.

The scene shifts to Baroka's bedroom where he is having the hairs of his armpit plucked by his favourite wife. Sadiku enters with the news that Sidi has refused his proposal stating that he is too old. Baroka then plots a plan. He knows very well about the tell-tale nature of Sadiku and he falsely tells her that he has become impotent.

In the final part of the play titled Night, Sadiku is seen rejoicing and dancing with pleasure. Sidi interrupts her merry-making and on asking for an explanation about her joy, Sadiku reveals that the Lion of Ilunjele has become impotent. On hearing this, Sidi plans to go to the Baroka and mock him. Lakunle, who has been listening all the while, is dead against the idea. However, his advice is given no notice and Sidi sets off for Baroka's house. On reaching his house, she finds Baroka in the bedroom engaged in a wrestling match. There are no servants in the house and none of Baroka's wives are present either as he had sent them away knowing very well that Sidi would come. Baroka wins the match and impresses Sidi with his stamp-making machine. He also pretends that

he had never sent Sadiku with a proposal for marriage. Sidi feels embarrassed and is also impressed by Baroka's words and ideas.

Meanwhile, Lakunle and Sadiku are waiting eagerly for Sidi's arrival. Lakunle is sure that Baroka must have either murdered her or else thrown her in the dungeons. Amidst the conversation between Sadiku and Lakunle, Sidi enters weeping revealing that she is no longer a virgin and that Baroka is not impotent. Lakunle is shocked. However, he is still willing to marry Sidi without the bride price. Sidi rushes off and when she does return, she is dressed as a bride and is going to marry Baroka. When Lakunle asks her why he is being rejected she replies that she has felt

“the strength, the perpetual youthful zest of the panther of the trees.”(57)²

The play ends with Sadiku, “the mother of brides,” invoking the fertile gods and Lakunle clearing a space among dancers who are celebrating for a new “madonna.”

Baroka is the chief of Ilujinle and a person of influence in the Yoruba society. Baroka represents the static traditional African values. He is regarded as the force behind the people's tradition. Baroka is a

person of eminence and as he is the chief, the villagers prostrate before him to show him their respect for him. In addition, he is an awe-inspiring figure for them as he is the village head.

Baroka is first introduced through Lakunle who speaks of him as the “master of self-indulgence.”(6) This is because Baroka has a great weakness for woman. He staunchly believes in taking new wives as though he has been recommended to do so by a doctor. It is for this reason that he wishes to have Sidi as his new wife. Besides, he feels that it has been a long period since he last took a wife. He says;

“it is full five months since last I took a wife-----full five months.” (18)

He is a man who lives a life of luxury and enjoys it too. Many servants, wives and concubines characterize his luxurious life. Baroka uses women as a mere piece of property-----a thing to be used and abandoned at the sight of a fresh one. He deems it prestigious to marry young girls for the purpose of their being his “sole out puller of my sweat bathed hairs.” (27) He is particularly interested in marrying Sidi so as to seek

“a new fame as the one man who has possessed the jewel of Ilujinle.” (21)

Baroka is not committed to progress in the society as he had the railway line diverted so that it may not pass the village end. He did this to protect the land from cultural invaders. Of this he remarks;

“I do not hate progress,
only its nature
Which makes all roofs and faces
look the same.” (47)

He is very much against westernization and the European culture. He does not favour modern ways yet he makes use of the stamp-making machine to impress Sidi.

Another characteristic of Baroka is that he is intelligent and cunning. In order to win Sidi over, he plots a plan and falsely spreads the news of his impotence. He is very confident that on hearing about his impotence, Sidi will come to mock him. In this manner, he is sure that Sidi will walk right into the lion's den and for that matter, right under the lion's claws.

The Bale has strong physical power and thrives on testing his strength by wrestling with other men. He is proud of his deeds of bravery and recounts;

“Did I not, at the festival of Rain,

Defeat the men in the log-tossing match?

Do I not still with the most fearless ones,

Hunt the leopard and the boa at night,

And save the farmer's goat from further harm?" (27)

Another aspect of Baroka's character is that he is a generous man.

About his generosity Sidi states;

"There are tales of his open-handedness," (40)

He is good and kind as

"-----he uses well

His dogs and horses." (41)

It may be said that Baroka is no doubt, a responsible man of the society who feels that it is his moral obligation to keep in continuity the Yoruba culture, its means and ways. He believes in following the ways of his forefathers and in keeping his tradition alive. It is for this reason he that wishes to protect his people from the alien European culture. He is a man of wisdom and learning. To sum up, Baroka is the hero of the play and undoubtedly, the Lion of Ilujinle who wins the Jewel of Ilunjile.

Lakunle on the other hand, is infatuated by the tawdry ways and means of the European culture about which he knows very little. This fact comes to our immediate attention when he enters the play dressed in

an old-fashioned and ill-fitting English suit. His comical appearance is a caricature of his character.

He is so deeply impressed by the European culture that he abhors his own Yoruba culture. He does not think highly of his own culture. His intolerance towards his culture is such that he detests everything about it. Lakunle dislikes the traditional dances. He says;

“-----This foolery bores me.

It is a game of idiots. I have work of more importance.” (14)

Lakunle carries his head held high, thinking of himself as the most learned and the wisest man in Ilujinle. He considers the other villagers as “savages,” “ignorant people” with “bush minds.” He does not give Baroka, who is the Bale of Ilujinle, his due respect. On the other hand, he tries sneaking away from the scene when Baroka enters to avoid prostrating before him.

Lakunle wants to marry Sidi whom he constantly woos in his comical manner. His manners are of least interest to Sidi. She considers him a “madman” like other villagers. While wooing her, he makes use of Christian proverbs, which make no sense to Sidi. He says;

“My Ruth, my Rachel, Esther, Bathsheba

Thou sum of fabled perfections

From Genesis to the Revelations-----."

Sidi: "Now that's your other game,

Giving me funny names you pick up

In your wretched books." (19)

Another instance which highlights his comical intellect while wooing Sidi is as follows;

Lakunle: "Sidi, my love will open your mind

Like the chaste leaf in the morning, when

The sun first touches it."

Sidi: "If you start that I will run away.

I had enough of that nonsense yesterday." (7)

Sidi further states that she is prepared to marry him provided he pays the bride price. Lakunle is firmly against this as he considers the bride price an "ignoble custom." This custom, according to him is,

"A savage custom, barbaric, outdated,

Rejected, denounced, accursed,

Excommunicated, archaic, degrading,

Humiliating----." (7)

Another aspect of Lakunle's character is that he considers women the weaker sex. He has books to prove it. Of their brain he says;

“Women have a smaller brain than men

That’s why they are called the weaker sex.” (6)

Sidi regards his talks senseless and meaningless. She states;

“You talk and talk and deafen me

With words which always sound the same

And make no meaning.” (8)

Lakunle is a character who is fit for laughing and jeering at. This is because Lakunle is not a serious prophet of real progress. He cannot differentiate between essential substance and chaff.

Sidi is the heroine in the play and she is introduced carrying a small pail of water on her head, dressed in a typical African broad-cloth, wrapped around her breasts leaving her shoulders bare. “She is a slim girl with plaited hair.”(3) Sidi is a simple, un-educated girl who has firmly rooted belief in her culture and in bride price. She is not at all fond of Lakunle but is prepared to marry him, despite the fact that she thinks of him as a “madman,” if he is prepared to pay the bride price.

“I shall marry you today, next week

Or any other day you name.

But my bride price must be paid.” (8)

She is proud of her beauty and is not embarrassed to make a show

of it. Of her beauty she says it is

“Beauty beyond the dreams of a goddess.” (11)

She further goes on to exemplify her beauty thus:

“There’s a deceitful message in my eyes

Beckoning insatiate men to certain doom.

And teeth that flash the sign of happiness,

Strong and evenly, beaming full of life.” (22)

Her joy swells ten-fold when her photograph is published on the main cover of a magazine. As the Bale’s photo is in a corner somewhere, she feels that she is more esteemed than the Bale. She states;

“This means that I am greater than

The Fox of the undergrowth,

The living god among men-----“ (12)

Once she sees her photo, she immediately reconsiders her decision to marry Lakunle because he is a “mere village school teacher” and marrying him would “demean” her worth. In fact, she even refuses the Bale’s proposal of marriage as

“He seeks new fame

As the one man who has possessed

The Jewel of Ilunjile.” (21)

Besides, she feels that Baroka is too old and fit to be her father.

Sidi is a brave girl as she had the courage to refuse Baroka's proposal. She is indifferent to the fact that being the Bale he is considered a god among villagers and regardless of the consequences that may follow.

She loves listening to gossip and "heresays." She thrives on gossip and is overjoyed when Sadiku tells her that Baroka has become impotent. It is this habit which takes her to Baroka's house to make fun of his disability. However, she learns by losing her chastity to Baroka that the story is false. Her habit takes her to the Bale's house where she learns that the gossip was false. Sidi eventually marries Baroka and becomes the new "madonna."

Other minor characters in the play include Sadiku, the photographer, village girls, a wrestler, dancers and Baroka's favourite.

Sadiku is the head wife of Baroka and an "old hag." She plays the role of an in-between for Baroka seeking new wives for him. She has a knack of putting right words in the right place to achieve her goal of finding new wives for Baroka. Sadiku has a "honey tongue."

Another factor of Sadiku's character is that she cannot keep secrets. The Baroka knows this trait in her and very tactfully uses her as

his weapon of spreading the rumour of his false impotence.

Sadiku may be a minor character in the play but her role is of great importance.

Other characters like the dancers and the village girls are used to display the Yoruba tradition in the drama. The photographer, the white surveyor, the wrestler and Baroka's favorite are of little significance in the drama. They all are appendices used by Soyinka to add to the variety of his play.

2.2 In-depth analysis of the cultural clash in the drama

“The Lion and the Jewel” is one of the earliest masterpieces written by Wole Soyinka. In this drama, Soyinka has presented various instances when the two cultures that is, Yoruba and European clash together. In-fact, the whole drama can be regarded as a center-stage for the portrayal of the clash in these two cultures.

The play is set in a remote village in Nigeria called Ilunjile. The description of the village is given in the following lines;

“A clearing on the edge of the market, dominated by an immense odan tree. It is the village center. The wall of the bush school flanks the stage on the right, and a rude window opens onto the stage from the wall. There is a chant of the ‘Arithmetic Times’ issuing from this window.” (3)

The paragraph immediately points out something alien in the village; something, which does not belong there. The chant of rhymes in the village immediately evokes the picture of a European entity in wrapped in a Yoruba background. Lakunle, the teacher who happens to be teaching his pupils the rhymes is outrageously dressed.

“He is dressed in an old-style English suit, threadbare but not

ragged, clean but not ironed, obviously a size or two too small. His tie is done in a very small knot, disappearing beneath a shiny black waistcoat. He wears twenty-three-in-bottom trousers, and blanco-white tennis shoes.” (3)

Lakunle’s comical appearance highlights a very significant fact about his nature, the fact being his infatuation towards the European culture about which he knows very little. Lakunle represents western civilization. His modus operandi in wooing Sidi remains the same. He makes use of proverbs from the Bible and tries to fit in long words in his speech to cast an impression on Sidi. Commenting on the bride-price custom, Lakunle remarks;

“A savage custom, barbaric, out-dated,
Rejected, denounced, accursed,
Excommunicated, archaic, degrading,
Humiliating, unspeakable, redundant.
Retrogressive, remarkable, unpalatable.”

Sidi: Is the bag empty? Why did you stop?

Lakunle: I own the Shorter Companion

Dictionary, but I have ordered

The Longer One-you wait!” (8)

The conversation clearly brings to light Lakunle's ignorance in trying to ape all that he can regardless of the fact whether it makes sense or not. He feels that he is a figure cut above the rest as he is attempting to copy the European ways. In a further exposure of his contemptuous attitude towards the African culture, the teacher criticizes Sidi for tying the familiar broad-cloth around her breasts thereby leaving her shoulders bare.

In another instance, he further goes in to justify his theory against the bride price and his fascination for the European culture in the following speech addressed to Sidi;

"Ignorant girl, can you not understand?

To pay the price would be

To buy a heifer off the market stall.

You'd be my chattel, my mere property.

No, Sidi! [*very tenderly.*]

When we are wed, you shall not walk or sit

Tethered, as it were, to my dirtied heels.

Together we shall sit at table

--Not on the floor—and eat,

Not with fingers but with knives

And forks, and breakable plates

Like civilized beings.

I will not have you wait on me

Till I have dined my fill.

No wife of mine, no lawful wedded wife

Shall eat the leavings off my plate---

That is for the children.

I want to walk beside you in the street,

Side by side and arm in arm

Just like the Lagos couples I have seen

High heeled shoes for the lady, red paint

On her lips. And hair is stretched

Like a magazine photo. I will teach you

The waltz and we'll both learn the foxtrot

And we'll spend the week-end in night clubs at Ibadan.

Oh, I must show you the grandeur of towns

We'll live there if you like or merely pay visits.

So choose. Be a modern wife-----" (9-10)

This comical speech only highlights Lakunle's thoughts which are prone towards fallacies of westernization; the glitz and glamour of the

European ways and means. He is highly fascinated by the European waltz and the foxtrot. His mannerisms are more superficial since he considers his own traditional ways of eating on the floor uncivilized and barbaric. It is also notable in the speech above that he states "no lawful wedded wife" of his would eat his leftovers. This is amusing since it implies that Lakunle has in his mind, the possibility of marrying more than one woman. It is ironical and once again, the clash of two cultures is portrayed since Lakunle's idea of having many wives is totally Yoruban in nature whereas, on the other hand, he presents himself as a stern follower of the European trends.

Lakunle's idea of progress is also very shallow. He defines progress in the following manner;

"Lakunle: (*With conviction*) Within a year or two, I swear

This town shall see a transformation

Bride-price will be a thing forgotten

And wives shall take place by men.

A motor road shall pass this spot

And bring the city ways to us.

We'll buy saucepans for all the women

Clay pots are crude and unhygienic

No man shall take more wives than one

That's why they are impotent so soon.

The ruler shall ride cars, not horses

Or a bicycle at the very least.

We'll burn the forests, cut the trees.

Then plant a modern park for lovers

We'll print newspapers everyday

With pictures of seductive girls.

The world will judge our progress by

The girls that win beauty contest.....

We must be modern with the rest

Or live forgotten by the world

We must reject the palm wine habit.

And take tea with milk and sugar." (34)

There is nothing wrong with the idea of progress if it is done in a good sense and in moderation. However, Lakunle's belief that these ways are the parameters for measuring the degree of civilization is not only childish and absurd but dogmatic as well. Lakunle's proposal highlights a dangerously superficial concept of progress, which is capable of eroding their very own cultural and traditional beliefs.

There is no harm in dreaming about motor roads, but there is something outrageous about it if the sole motive of motor roads is the importation of foreign values in the village. Similarly, saucepans and clay pots perform the same function as pots made of different material, that is, cooking. The question of "unhygienic" state of the clay pot is uncalled for since saucepans too can become contaminated if left unwashed for a long time. Furthermore, the one-man-one woman law was endorsed not because polygamy made men impotent early but for more practical reasons. Nearly all of Lakunle's proposals have leaking ends. However, the most mundane of them all is Lakunle's conviction that the introduction of striptease girls "who will win beauty contests" would be an outlet for the world to judge Ilunjile's progress.

Although Lakunle deeply detests their own cultural ways, he himself vows under the name of Sango, which happens to be their tribal god. This is ironic as well as humorous since Lakunle poses as the prophet of European civilization.

Baroka on the other hand, represents the static African culture. He is regarded as the force behind the people's tradition as he is the Bale. He typifies some traditional rulers in Africa generally, and Yourubaland in particular. Baroka as a leader does not favour progress although he

claims that he has nothing against it. This is proved by the fact that he bribed the white surveyor so that a railway track could not be built through the village. Being a cunning fox, he was well aware of the fact that if a railway line was built, it would enhance the passage for tourists in the village. The tourists would then introduce new fanged ideas in the village thus corrupting the culture and tradition that existed in Ilunjile. His action is justified, as he wanted to protect his land from cultural invaders. Baroka is a retrogressive agent in his society in this respect. Of progress he says:

“Among the bridges and murderous roads,
 Below the humming birds which
 Smoke the face of Sango, dispenser of
 The snake-tongue lightning; between this moment
 And the reckless broom that will be wielded
 In these years to come, we must leave
 Virgin plots of lives, rich decay
 And the tang of vapour rising from
 Forgotten heaps of compost, lying
 Undisturbed.....But the skin of progress
 Masks, unknown, the spotted wolf of sameness.....” (47-48)

This speech brings to light the precise thoughts of Baroka regarding progress and westernization. He is well aware of the fact that the European culture is eroding their existing Yoruba culture. He also does not deny the fact that in coming years alien culture will throw smoke in the face of Sango, their native god, by means of motor vehicles. He further goes on to state that brooms will be used by the people in the village instead of the regular mops for cleaning the floors. He does lament the loss the Yoruba ways and ideas in the time to come however, he states that the present Yoruba generation must leave values and cultures as examples to be cited by the future generations.

His attitude towards women is also like that of most men in the African society. His position as a Bale grants him the permission to "take" as many wives as he pleases. This is again part of the African culture and more especially of the Yoruba culture. He is intoxicated with the habit of taking many wives and also changing them frequently. He states rather proudly;

"I also change my wives

When I learn to tire them."

Sidi: Is this another.....changing time

For the Bale?

Baroka: Who knows? Until the finger nails

Have scraped the dust, no one can tell

Which insect released his bowels. (39)

He is proud of his culture, tradition and customs. As stated above, he is fond of using Yoruban proverbs in his conversation. He does not think much of the Bible;

Baroka: Yesterday's wine alone is strong blooded, child,

And though the Christian's holy book denies

The truth of this....." (49)

However, even though Baroka condemns the European ways, it is ironic that he makes use of a stamp-making machine to impress Sidi. He woos and deceives Sidi with a European invention.

The Jewel of the play, Sidi represents the new generation. She is a typical Yoruba girl and is defined as a "true village belle." As mentioned earlier, she is not fascinated by Lakunle's modern European ideas. The reasons being that his ideas sound a bit far-fetched and foreign in nature. On the other hand, she favours Baroka by marrying him since Baroka symbolizes the Yoruba tradition with which she has always been familiar. An irony though, is that she is impressed by the Baroka's stamp-making machine, which is a western device. Of Baroka's talks she says;

“Everything you say, Bale,
Seems wise to me.” (49)

Sidi rejects the half-formed values of the schoolteacher and prefers conservatism to muddle headed progress and the European culture. She marries Baroka because he is more dignified, impressive and an authentic figure. Furthermore, Baroka is more solidly grounded to his Yoruba roots. He does not know and does not care to know where the world is going but he knows where he belongs in it.

“The Lion and the Jewel” therefore, is a reflection of the contending Yoruba values in a village. The cardinal dramatic situation is the dilemma of choice between Lakunle’s European culture that he plans to impose on the village, and Baroka’s conservative traditional system of living.

Every character in the play is confronted with both the European and the Yoruba culture. Lakunle prefers European culture to his own and yet, he vows in the name of Yoruba gods. Lakunle’s character celebrates Western culture and civilization. Similarly, Baroka values his own culture yet he uses the European ways in wooing Sidi.

“The Lion and the Jewel” is a celebration of Baroka, his vitality and his cunning nature. The most important message in the play is the

playwright's call for the traditional and the modern to blend and fuse together for the good of mankind. Soyinka uses Baroka as his mouthpiece and gives a message saying;

“The old must flow into the new, Sidi,
Not blind itself or stand foolishly
Apart.....” (49)

Soyinka further says through Baroka;

“ And the haste of youth
Must learn its temper from the gloss
Of ancient leather, from a strength
Knit close along the grain” (48-49)

Soyinka wishes to point out that individuals should not forget or ignore their own customs and traditions when adapting to a new culture. His play stands at the confluence of two traditions: the Yoruba and the European.

Notes and references

¹ Bale, is a Nigerian word meaning chief.

² Wole Soyinka, "Collected Plays Volume 2," Oxford University Press 1974. All quotations taken in this chapter are taken from this book.

"KONGI'S **HARVEST"**

Chapter 3: “Kongi’s Harvest.”

3.1 Summary of the drama and a general outline of its characters

This play was produced in 1976 and is an exciting piece of festival drama. It is richly composite theater, dispersed paranomically over seven different settings and mixing the raucous political satire of part-Brechtian, part-illusionist sketches and songs with the visionary poetics and ritual choreography of the festival. The play dramatizes the confrontation in Ismaaland between the traditional government of Oba Danlola and the new self-imposed regime of President Kongi. The play further highlights the decline of people-oriented system of administration and the ascendancy of the corrupt and tyrannical administration of the modern state under the leadership of Kongi. The play is set in the imaginary African State of Isma during the preparation for the celebration and the aftermath of the New Yam Festival¹. The ruler of Isma, Kongi, is a repressive, ambitious autocrat, who is assisted by a ubiquitous Organizing Secretary, advised by a fraternity of largely sycophantic Aweris and enthusiastically supported by a brutal

Carpenter's Brigade.

The other party in the play, which is against the rule of Kongi in Ismaland comprises of the traditional ruler; Oba Danlola, Sarumi; the junior Oba, Daodu; Sarumi's son and the heir to Danlola's throne, Segi; a courtsean and Kongi's ex-mistress.

The play is divided into four parts, namely; Hemlock, First Part, Second Part and the Epilogue, which is titled as the Hangover. In the first part of the play, we come across Oba Danlola who has been put under detention by his most powerful opponent; Kongi. Although Kongi has been able to put Oba Danlola and some of his other opponents under detention, he has not been able to quell the Oba's ebullient and independent opposition.

The Hemlock begins by a traditional dance being performed by Oba Danlola and his group of close-knit people. The song highlights the position of Oba Danlola and his people and is as follows;

"Ism to Ism for ism is ism

Of isms and isms on absolute ism

To demonstrate the tree of life

Is sprung from open peat

And we the rotted bark, spurned

When the tree swells its pot
 The mucus that is snorted out
 When Kongi's new race blows
 And more, oh there's a harvest of words
 In a penny newspaper." (61)²

As the song suggests, Kongi and his men have spurned Oba Danlola just like a rotted bark. The position of Oba Danlola is sympathetic as well tragic as he is living in a prison cell in detention as a prisoner amongst his own people. During the course of the song, the Superintendent enters agitated telling Oba Danlola to stop the foolery and be his age. According to him:

"These antics may look well on a common agitator but really,
 an elder is an elder, and a king does not become a menial
 just because he puts down his crown to eat." (62)

In an attempt to stop the merry-making by Oba Danlola he stops the royal drums. Initially, Oba Danlola is shocked but recovers soon enough pointing out, after regaining his composure that his betters "stopped the drums a long time ago." (63) He further states that the

drums were silenced when Kongi caste aside his wisdom and took over the land of Isma. Oba Danlola further reveals Kongi's intention of eating the first of the New Yam. While listening to Oba, the Superintendent castes his eyes at Danlola's attire and is shocked to see that the Oba has used the national flag as his underwear. Aghast at the sight, he "whips off the flag"(64), leaving Danlola in a frenzied state of semi-nudity. The Superintendent further rebukes Oba Danlola for taking undue advantage of the freedom granted to him under detention. To this, Oba Danlola remarks sarcastically;

" We curse a wretch denying cause

For gratitude deserved, but it is

A mindless clown who dispenses

Thanks as a fowl scatters meal

Not caring where it falls. Thanks?

In return for my long fingers of largesse

Your man knows I love to have my hairs

Ruffled well below the navel.

Denied that, are you or he the man

To stop me from breaking out of camp?

And granting my retainers leave

To keep me week-end company- is that also

Reason for the grass to tickle [*slapping his belly*]

The royal wine-gourd? Well?

What says the camp Superintendent?

Shall I?

[*Makes a motion as if he means to prostrate himself.*] “ (64-65)

The retainers are shocked to see their king about to prostrate as it is considered a taboo for the chief to bow to anyone. Furthermore, the Superintendent is also shocked, as he does not want a curse falling on his head by allowing the king to prostrate before him. Sarumi and his men try to pacify the king's anger and eventually succeed in doing so. The Hemlock ends with Oba Danlola singing a sad song which is as follows;

“This is the last

Our feet shall touch together

We thought the tune obeyed us to the soul

But the drums are newly shaped

And stiff arms strain

On stubborn crooks, so

Delve with the left foot

For ill-luck; with the left

Again for ill-luck; once more

With the left alone, for disaster is the only certainty we know.”

[the bugles join in royal cadences, the king dance slow, mournful steps, accompanied by their retinue . Coming down on the scene, a cage of prison bars separating Danlola from Sarumi-----] (69)

The Hemlock sets the base for the rest of the play. It gives a vivid picture of the conditions prevailing in Ismaland. Various factors are highlighted in the Hemlock. Firstly, the Oba of the village has been put under detention and he has been in detention for a year. Kongi, who is presently the President of Ismaland has usurped Oba Danlola's position. However, he has not yet fully established himself as the rightful leader of the land. To establish himself as the leader he plans to eat the first of the New Yam in front of all the people of Isma. It is obvious from the Hemlock that a certain section of the community is in favour of Oba Danlola while others, who happen to be Kongi's men, favour Kongi.

The First part of the play has very little action. In it, the action is switched back and forth between Kongi's Mountain Retreat and Segi's Night Club. In the mountain retreat, against the chant in honour of Kongi, the Aweris bicker and squabble in their endeavour to manufacture an image for the dictator. The Aweris are a group of six people who favour

Kongi. It is the fourth Aweri who suggests that they desperately need an image for Kongi since the following day is the day the New Yam festival and more importantly, the day when Kongi will make his first public appearance. The second Aweri suggests at presenting themselves as Kongi's disciples while the first Aweri insists on patterning themselves on their predecessors even though they "were a little old-fashioned." (70) After much squabbling and argument the Aweris finally decide to present themselves with a scientific image. This suggestion is made by the fourth Aweri who states that the image

"would be a positive stamp and one very much in tune
with our contemporary situation.

Our pronouncements should be dominated by a positive
scientificism." (71)

The first scene ends at this point and the second scene shifts to Segi's Night Club. The club is a third point in the political, social and emotional landscape of Ismaland. It has coloured lights and a "juju band guitar gone typically mad." (72) There is drinking, dancing and a conspiratorial air brewing against Kongi in this Night Club.

At this point, the Organizing Secretary enters escorted by his two men that is, the Right and Left Ears of the State. When they enter, the

reaction against them is evident as

“some night-lifters pick up their drinks and go in, there are one or two aggressive departures, some stay on defiantly, others obsequiously try to attract attention and say a humble greeting.”(72)

The Secretary has come with a mission. The mission is to find out from Daodu, who happens to be Oba Danlola’s nephew, about what his Uncle has up his sleeves for the festival the following day. It is an amusing scene as the Secretary is constantly distracted by Segi’s beauty. This scene is of very little significance.

The scene once more shifts to Kongi’s mountain retreat where the Aweris are shown starving since they are fasting like their leader. At this point, the Secretary enters with the image for Kongi for the next Five-Year Development Plan. The image is that of a “benevolent father of the nation.” (76) He further tells them that the key word for the festival is Harmony. The plan of the festival is further revealed. The plan is to have Oba Danlola hand over the New Yam to Kongi with his own hands before the public. In this manner, the entire nation will be in favour of Kongi. However, the first Aweri points out that Oba Danlola would never give in to this plan as he is a “stubborn old man.” The Secretary then

urges the Aweris to come up with idea so that the plan is executed. For he points out

“Kongi must preside as the Spirit of Harvest,
in pursuance of the Five-Year Development Plan.” (77)

The fourth scene is once more shifted to Segi’s Night Club. Here the Secretary is seen continuing his conversation with Daodu trying to find what plans are brewing against Kongi. Daodu is a clever young man and diverts the conversation by stating that he is looking forward to the festival, as he is sure of winning the prize for the New Yam. He further pretends that he has no problem with Kongi eating the New Yam as “---- the old order changeth.” (78) The Secretary is impressed with Daodu and reveals that there was a time when Kongi and his men were worried that Daodu would pose as a problem but now his fears are at rest.

Back in Kongi’s retreat, the Aweris are shown quarrelling over trivial matters. The fifth Aweri is nothing more than an imbecile as he speaks of nothing, thinks of nothing apart from food. Their task is to find a way out to bring Oba Danlola to the festival as the Secretary had asked them to do earlier, “thereby acknowledging the supremacy of the State over his former areas of authority, spiritual or secular.”(81) Eventually, in a secretive tone and away from his other team members, the fifth

Aweri offers a solution to the Secretary. He suggests that the Secretary should tackle Kongi asking him to free some of the detainees in exchange for Oba Danlola handing him the New Yam. It is noteworthy that in return for the solution, the fifth Aweri asks the Secretary to smuggle in food for him----bribery in short. The Secretary at once rushes back to Daodu telling him about the deal and asking him to convince his uncle about it. He then rushes of to convince Kongi about the deal. He is able to convince Kongi to free the detainees however, Kongi adds that the

“act of clemency remains a confidential decision
until a quarter of an hour before the hanging-no,
five minutes.” (94)

Back in Segi’s Night Club, the Secretary tells Daodu that he has Kongi’s word for sparing the lives of five men and granting them freedom provided Oba Danlola hands Kongi the New Yam. However, by the end of the conversation, the Secretary has only three lives to spare since one man has hanged himself while the other, who happens to be Segi’s father, has escaped. Daodu feels that even three lives are sufficient enough to bargain with for the New Yam.

The final scene of the First Part begins with the Secretary informing Kongi about the death of one prisoner and the escape of the

other. On hearing this, Kongi in a fit of anger declares that the “amnesty is off.”(100) He commands the Secretary to hang the remaining three on the next day. The first part ends with Kongi going into an epileptic fit in his anger.

The First Part in the play barely has any action in it. The main aim in this part is to highlight the on-going preparations for the Yam Festival, which is to be held the following day. It also brings to light the influence that Segi’s club has on the men of Kongi. Obviously, the Secretary is not very comfortable while sitting in Segi’s club, as he is well aware of the air of contempt that the people in the club hold against Kongi and his men. A comical aspect in the First part is the group of Aweri’s who constantly quarrel over trivial matters. As such, this part is not of much significance.

The Second Part opens with bustling activity in Oba Danlola’s palace. Oba Danlola is making preparations for the festival. He is “trying on one thing, rejecting it and trying on another.” (101) He personally feels that he obtained much better service in the detention camps. He is making a fuss about his sceptre to Dende. Oba Danlola remarks about his sceptre in a comical fashion;

“Do you dare to call this a sceptre?

This dung-stained goat prod, this
 Makeshift sign at crossroads, this
 Thighbone of the crow that died
 Of rickets? Or did you merely
 Steal the warped backscratcher
 Of your hunchback uncle?" (101)

While Dende is trying to give an explanation about the form of the sceptre, Daodu comes in and stops abruptly at the sight of Oba Danlola preparing for the festival. Incidentally, Daodu had been informed that Oba Danlola would not be attending the festival. To his utter astonishment, Oba Danlola confirms Daodu's fears and clarifies that he is not going to take part in the procession. Furthermore, he is just creating a false air to deceive Kongi. He states rather cunningly,

"The ostrich also sports plumes but
 I've yet to see that wise bird
 Leave the ground." (101)

Daodu is rather confused as to why Oba Danlola is creating such a fuss about his attire when he does not intend to be present anyway. To this, Oba replies that the Big Ears of the state have been keeping an eye on him since morning, observing every move that he makes thereby

suspecting him of false play. The conversation between the two men flows casually and eventually, Oba Danlola asks Daodu about Segi,

“The woman whose eyes unblinking as
The dead have made you drunk?” (104)

Undoubtedly, Oba Danlola feels that she is not the right kind of woman for Daodu simply because she was Kongi’s ex-mistress and could therefore, prove fatal for Daodu. During the course of the conversation, the Secretary enters in a frenzy asking Oba Danlola to hurry up or else he would be late for the festival. Oba Danlola reprimands him stating that

“An Oba must emerge
In sun colours as a laden alter.” (106)

The Secretary leaves Oba Danlola as he is a busy man and has to attend to the other Obas. After his departure, Sarumi enters prostrating himself before Oba Danlola. A traditional dance and song routine follows wherein Oba Danlola and Sarumi are fully obsessed.

*“The two Obas cavort round the chamber in sedate,
regal steps and the bugles blast a steady refrain. Danlola’s wives
emerge and join in; the atmosphere is full of the ecstasy of the
dance. At its height Daodu moves with sudden decision, pulls out
the ceremonial whisk of Danlola and hits the lead drum with the*

heavy handle. It bursts. There is a dead silence. Danlola and Daodu face each other in a long terrible silence.” (112)

Daodu justifies his action by stating that he wanted to have a few words with Oba Danlola. He reveals that the prisoner who escaped is none other than Segi's father and that they have conspired a plan against Kongi, which cannot be fulfilled without Danlola's participation in the festival. He states rather candidly;

“I cannot explain it now. Time is short and we have much to do. But I must have your word that you will play your part.” (112)

Danlola finally does give his consent but on the condition that he will not

“bear the offering past the entrance of the mosque.” (115)

The next scene shows the preparations going on for the festival. There is the Carpenter's Brigade who are singing an anthem in praise of Kongi whom they have labelled as their Saviour and their redeemer. The anthem ends with the carpenters saluting in the Nazi fashion. The Secretary and the Captain enter into a humorous conversation with Dende. The Aweri's are shown taking their position on stage. It is a comical situation as the third Aweri tells the fourth Aweri that his speech is too short despite the fact that it is four-and-a-half hours long. He

suggests that he should do something to increase the length of the speech. Meanwhile, the Secretary is at his best trying to make sure that all the arrangements are in perfect order. At the absence of the Auxiliary Corps, he gets agitated;

“-----where are the Women’s Auxiliary Corps? The job
Of cooking the New Yam is theirs and lateness means trouble.”
(121)

On the other hand, Daodu has won the New Yam competition and his men are rejoicing like lunatics. The Secretary is not very happy with their jubilee and reveals that he did his best

“To rig the results in favour of
The state co-operatives, but that man
Anticipated every move. And then his yam!
Like a giant wrestler with legs
And forearms missing-----“ (121)

While the Secretary is telling the Captain that he will taste the yam to check for any fallacies out of revenge, Danlola, Sarumi and the Old Aweri enter with the royal drums and bugles announcing their entry. Danlola informs the Secretary that he has come to see Dadu’s dance. He remarks further;

“Daodu intends to dance or to make others dance.....” (123)

The Secretary is more interested in knowing whether Danlola will be handing the New yam to Kongi or not. Danlola confirms that he will stating

“If the young sapling bends, the old twig

If it resists the wind, can only break.” (123)

Finally, the Women Corps arrive but what is shocking is that Segi is their leader. The Secretary is aghast and flabbergasted when he learns that the Women Corps have appointed Segi as their leader. Leaving him in his state of astonishment, the women go off to welcome Daodu. The conversation between Segi and Daodu suggests that their plan will be carried out during the course of Daodu’s speech. Segi has her doubts about the plan. She feels that now that her father has escaped, she wishes that the plan was never made.

Eventually, the man himself that is, Kongi arrives. Daodu begins his speech. The climax of the speech is when Daodu hands the yam over to Danlola asking him to further hand it to Kongi. Daodu makes the following statement while handing over the yam;

“So let him, the Jesus of Isma, let him, who has assumed

the mantle of a Messiah, accept from my farming settlement

the gift of soil and remember that a human life once buried cannot, like this yam, sprout anew. Let him take from the palm only its wine and not crucify lives upon it.”

Followed by the Aweri, Danlola bears the New Yam to Kongi. Kongi places his over it in benediction and in that moment there is a burst of gun-fire which paralyses everyone. (128)

The gun-fire has killed none other than Segi's father. The Secretary informs Kongi and later on Segi that her father has been shot dead. Segi however, does not break down. Instead she asks Daodu to go on with the plan. Daodu knows that they have failed although Segi feels that that they've not lost altogether. She goes away telling Daudo that she will return with a gift for Kongi.

Kongi, meanwhile, begins his speech wherein he praises himself. After the speech, dancing and singing commence. At the end of the song however,

“A copper salver is raised suddenly high; it passes from hands to hands above the women's heads; they dance with it on their heads; it is thrown from one side to the other until it at last reaches Kongi's table and Segi throws open the lid. In it, the head of an old man. In the ensuing scramble, no-one is left but Kongi and the head, Kongi's mouth wide

open and speechless in terror. A sudden blackout on both.” (131-132)

This is the manner in which the second part ends. Obviously, the head thrown on Kongi's table belongs to none other than Segi's father. Segi manages to take Kongi by surprise and makes a muffled symbolic statement about the brutal regime by presenting Kongi with the severed head of her father.

In the final part of the play titled the Hangover, the Secretary is shown making way for the border carrying all his amenities in a bundle over his shoulder. He is fleeing Kongi's land. The other people he happens to meet on his way are Dende and Oba Danlola. He first comes across Dende from whom he enquires about the state of the Carpenter's Brigade. He learns from Dende that they have fled as well. Oba Danlola happens to meet the two men and sets off to hasten Daodu's departure. The royal anthem rises and plays for a short while, then the sound of an iron grating is heard: it *“descends and hits the ground with a loud, final clang.”* (138) The implication being that Kongi's rule asserts itself more repressively than ever. This is how the play concludes itself; on a note of pessimism.

The main characters in the play include Kongi and Oba Danlola. A brief outline of their character is given below.

The two main characters in the play are Kongi and Oba Danlola. They are opposite parties and antagonists. It is interesting to note their various characteristics, which are exact opposites.

Kongi parades himself as “a benevolent father of the nation” but ironically, his regime is not people-centered but self-centered. Kongi seems to arrogate everything to himself: people swear in his name. Although he is the President of Isma, his rule is self-imposed. He is introduced in the First Part of the play “seen dimly in his own cell”(70) in his retreat in the mountains. Amongst the Aweris, the second Aweri thinks of him as a strategist.

Kongi does not believe in the traditional government. Instead, he has modern thoughts and ideas and prefers “a clean break from the traditional conclave of the so-called wise ones.”(70) His tyrannical government is so strong that even the annual calendar changes in his favour. Furthermore, he arrogates to himself both human and god’s powers. It is only for this reason that he desires Oba Danlola to perform all his customary duties to him instead of the gods.

He is a pompous and proud man who considers himself a cut above the rest. As he himself points out in an arrogant fashion;

“I am the Spirit of Harvest.” (36-37)

To the Secretary, Kongi is the “power of life and death.”(38)

Kongi’s arrogant fashion and dictatorial stance can be seen in the manner and style in which he treats his men. That is, besides starving them, whenever he does make an appearance he does nothing but bully and command them. When he enters in the first session, he states;

“Do they have all the facts?” (18)

Thereafter he promptly leaves the scene with the order on

“an immediate disputation on the subject then a planning session.”

(18).

Kongi is undoubtedly a shadow player and a confusionist. He has the knack of playing on the intelligence of his oppressed subjects.

Oba Danlola on the other hand is a complete antithesis to Kongi. Danlola is an image of the old order indurance vile. He is warm, witty, mischievous and dignified. He is also a sympathetic character. As a Yoruban chief he has played his role magnificently. In the drama, he has established himself as a seamless combination of high values and ideals. More details of both these opposite parties are discussed in the second part of this chapter.

Other major characters in the drama are Daodu and Segi. Daodu, is a young man and although he belongs to the new generation, he firmly

believes in the Yoruban ways of his ancestors. It is for this reason that he is against Kongi's rule. Daodu plays the role of a young protagonist. He is presented as an admirable contender for leadership: through his father Sarumi and through Danlola. He also has the legitimate claim to leadership under the traditional system. Daodu also has a wide experience of the world and has demonstrated his powers of leadership and his ability to promote fecundity by his position in the farming settlement. He is the true Spirit of Harvest and he preaches life, guided by Segi.

We are first introduced to Daodu in Segi's nightclub where the Secretary has come on an errand to make a deal with him. The deal being that Daodu should convince his uncle, Danlola to hand over the New Yam to Kongi, in return for which Kongi will release detainees who have been sentenced to death. Daodu does agree to convince his uncle. However, Daodu is a clever young man. He has plans up his sleeve against Kongi. Clearly, he is a brave man. He states; "----Time is short and we have much to do." (112)

Indeed, on the day of the festival, Daodu proves his metal by giving a speech against Kongi, the Messiah of Pain. Glaring at Kongi, he had the guts to state;

“An impotent man will swear that he feels the pangs of labour;
when the maniac finally looks over the wall, he finds that there,
agony is the raw commodity which he has spent lives to invent.”

(127)

Although, he is well aware that he is fighting a lost battle, he
continues to condemn Kongi.

Another aspect of Daodu's character is his undying love for Segi,
Kongi's ex-mistress. He sings in her honour;

“Your eyes are

Cowrie shells, their cups

Have held much brine

It rained

Beads of grace

That hour of your birth

But it fell

From baleful skies.” (88-89)

Even though Daodu is not the central character in the play, he most
certainly has a pivotal role. He does what nobody has done so far; he has
publicly voiced his opinion against Kongi, regardless of the
consequences he might have to face.

Segi, who happens to be the owner of the Night Club and Kongi's ex-mistress, is a beautiful lady and a lady with a sharp mind. Much has been said about her beauty and men sing in her praise. Of her beauty it is stated;

“Your eyes were bathed

In tender waters

Milk of all mothers

Flowed through your fingers

At your hour of birth

And they say of her skin, it is a flash of ‘agbadu’³ through the sun and into cool shadows. Of her nipples, palm nuts, red flesh and black shadows, and violent as thorns” (87-88)

Apart from being beautiful, Segi is also gifted with a clever mind. During their showdown in the festival when Daodu has lost all hope and feels that they've failed in their mission, it is Segi who convinces him to carry on. She says;

“----I shall return soon with a season's gift for the Leader.” (129)

The Leader being referred to is Kongi and the gift that she brings for him is the severed head of her father. This act is a landmark. Kongi

has definitely not achieved all that he wanted to. Kongi is reduced to a gesticulating, sweating figure, foaming in the background, possessed by a Spirit of Hatred. Segi has managed to take Kongi by surprise and has been able to make a symbolic statement about Kongi's regime.

Segi is not a round figure but she fulfills an important dramatic function: she establishes that the female principle supports the opposition to dictatorship and, on occasions, leads to it.

The minor characters in the play include Sarumi, the Organizing Secretary, the Superintendent, Kongi's Aweri's, who happen to be six in number, Dende, the praise singers, the Carpenter's Brigade, Photographer and night club habitué's. These characters add to the variety of the drama and as such are of little significance.

3.2 Cultural Clash in “Kongi’s Harvest.”

The cultural clash in the drama is portrayed in the form of conflict between two leaders. One leader is traditional while the other is modern. The traditional ruler happens to be Oba Danlola. His government stands for all things Yoruba in form whereas Kongi’s government represents modern European norms in totality. Kongi is an embodiment of modern thoughts and ideas. The drama presents an interesting head-on collision between the rulers and their respective thoughts and ideas.

In the Hemlock, Oba Danlola with his retinue of drummers and close-knit people is shown indulging in a traditional Yoruba dance sequence accentuated with a “roll of drums such as accompanies a national anthem.” (62) The anthem is as follows:

“They say, oh how

They say it all on silent skulls

But who cares? Who but a lunatic

Will bandy words with boxes

With government rediffusion sets

Which talk and talk and never

Take a lone word in reply?

I cannot counter words, oh

I cannot counter words of

A rediffusion set

My ears are sore

But my mouth is 'agbayun'⁴

For I do not bandy words

No, I do not bandy words

With a government loudspeaker." (61-62)

The stanzas above clearly bring out the dislike for modern inventions by Oba Danlola and his men. As it is, the "rediffusion sets" referred to, are in-fact radios which are called "boxes" since these devices are incapable of holding a two-way conversation. They are unable to answer a single question asked by the audience in question. It is obvious from this anthem that Kongi's presidency has introduced the radio in Ismailand. According to this anthem, it is only a lunatic who would be in favour of such devices. The anthem is comical and presents the radio as a blabbering unit. The device makes their ears sore but their mouth wanting to speak. It is sarcastically referred to as a "government

loudspeaker.” The anthem brings to light that Oba Danlola and his men prefer the typical Yourban tradition of conveying news in meetings held in the village. In this type of meeting views are exchanged amongst a group of people. Obviously, Kongi’s modern equipments fail to impress Danlola and his men who still very much believe in Yoruba ways and ideas.

In an attempt to stop the merry-making, the Superintendent who intervenes and stops the royal drums is dressed in a European uniform. This act is an indication of the Yoruba rule being silenced and stamped out under the British rule. Oba Danlola rightly points out;

“No, it is nothing new. Your betters

Stopped the drums a long time ago

And you the slave in khaki and brass buttons

Now lick your master’s spit and boast,

We chew the same tobacco.” (63)

The khaki and brass buttons are a part of the European dress code and as such are detested by Oba Danlola and his people. Oba Danlola calls the Superintendent a slave of the modern rule and further states that men of his likes demean their worth by following Kongi and his ways. To place emphasis on his point, he further states;

"Good friend, you merely stopped
 My drums. But they were silenced
 On the day when Kongi caste aside
 My props of wisdom, the day he
 Drove the old Aweri from their seats." (63)

The old Aweri referred to were Oba Danlola's body of elders, who under the traditional rule were responsible for the proper functioning of the state. All decisions whether big or small, were made only when their consent was given. However, Kongi dissolved this group and instead put his men in their place and titled the group as the "Reformed Aweri Fraternity." According to Oba Danlola, it was,

"A big name for small heads." (63)

Kongi has made vast changes under his rule. Apart from assigning a Reformed fraternity, he also has under him the Carpenter's Brigade. They are Kongi's army who dole out his orders including those that are gruesome too. The Brigade thus presents itself;

"We are the nation's carpenters
 We build for Isma land
 From the forests of Kuramba
 They bring the timber wild

And we saw and plane and tame the wood
To bring the grains to light
Converting raw material
To 'Made in Ismaland.'

Men of peace and honour
Are the Carpenter's Brigade
But primed for fight or action
To defend our motherland
We spread the creed of Kongism
To every son and daughter
And heads too slow to learn it
Will feel our mallets weight.

Though rough and ready workers
Our hearts are solid gold
To beat last year's production
Is our target every year
We're total teetotaler
Except on local brew
For its guts of toughened leather

That survive on Isma gin.

Our hands are like sandpaper

Our fingernails are chipped

Our lungs are filled with sawdust

But our anthem still we sing

We sweat in honest labour

From sunrise unto dawn

For the dignity of labour

And the progress of our land.

For Kongi is our father

And Kongi is our man

Kongi is our mother

Kongi is our man

And Kongi is our saviour

Redeemer, prince of power

For Isma and for Kongi

We're proud to live and die." (116)

It is evident from the Brigade's anthem that Kongi's rule is thrust

upon the people of Isma. Those who do not subject themselves to Kongi are killed brutally by the Brigade, regardless of whether they are male or female, adults or children. Kongi's rule is nothing but an extension of cruelty. His men are rough and trained to carry out his orders. They are crude signposts of the modern rule in Ismaland. It is ironic that the workers consider themselves as having "hearts of gold" yet they commit cold-blooded murders on Kongi's command. They consider Kongi as their father, mother, king, saviour and redeemer for whom they can sacrifice their lives if the need arises to do so. The army of Kongi reminds one of the army of Hitler in every aspect and the Brigade's Nazi salute highlights this point even further. Indeed, the Brigade is but a grim shadow caste over the land of Isma.

The anthem exposes a lot of absurdities in the new government. The people are asked to patronize homemade goods, but the first stanza ridicules the government's hypocrisy in this matter. That is, finished wood-works that are "Made in Ismaland" are only assembled in Ismaland, the raw materials come from foreign countries. The song tends to ridicule and cajole the *raison d'être* of banning foreign made drinks because of their excessive alcoholic contents when the local gin is worse.

Another aspect under Kongi's modern constitution is the body of

Women Auxiliary corps. The function of this particular group is basically to cook the New Yam for Kongi. It is boisterously entertaining to note that such a worthy title is given for merely cooking the yam. What is more shocking is that the women who belong to this group were originally prostitutes. The Secretary informs us;

“--- All the prostitutes were sent off to a rehabilitation camp, and on graduation they became the Women’s Auxiliary Corps, a sort of female leg of the Carpenter’s Brigade.” (87)

Corruption is another major factor under Kongi’s rule. There are all sorts of bribes offered and received under his wings. To begin with, during an argument among the Aweri’s regarding their fasting, the conversation reveals not only monetary bribery but sexual bribery as well. The Fifth Aweri tells the First Aweri

“Atleast you get fed and if you have money you can live life like a king----ask our dear Organizing secretary if you don’t believe me.

Secretary: Are you suggesting something nasty sir?

Fifth : Don’t act innocent with me. If a detainee pays your price you’ll see to his comforts. I bet our royal prisoner has put on

weight since he came under your charge.

Secretary: This is slander.

Fifth: Sue me.

Secretary: I refuse to listen to any more of this.

Fifth: And a full sex-life too I bet. Are you going to tell me you don't issue week-end permits to his wives.

Secretary: You are taking advantage of your privileged position.

Fifth: I waive it to you shameless bribe collector. Say whatever is on

Your mind, or take me to court. I waive my philosophic immunity.

Secretary: All right. So I take bribes. It only puts me on the same level with you. " (82)

This conversation makes it very clear that bribery is very much a part of Kongi's land. The "royal ruler" who is being referred to, is none other than Oba Danlola. Corruption is not unknown to any of Kongi's men and in addition, Oba Danlola also bribes the Secretary so that he is able to meet his wives on week-end to satisfy his sexual pangs. Clearly enough, bribes are offered as a way of life; it is a very natural phenomenon for the people residing in Isma.

Kongi wishes to cast aside all ancient thoughts of the Yoruba clan. It is for this reason that he plans to

“eat the first of the New yam.” (63)

This, according to Yoruba culture is blasphemy. As it is, the new yam is presented by the Oba to the god of Harvest, to the Spirit of Harvest so that the harvest can be blessed. Therefore, Kongi's plan that Oba Danlola should present the New Yam to him is his way of presenting himself as the Spirit of Harvest; the modern god of the modern rule.

Kongi's committee of Reformed Aweri men is but an extension of his modern thoughts, which are least impressive and more comical in nature. When hunting for an image to present their leader, they state;

Fourth: “-----Kongi would prefer a clean

break form the traditional conclave of the so-called wise ones.

First: They were remote, impersonal --- we need these aspects.

They breed fear in the common man.

Second: The paraphernalia helped too, don't forget that.

Sixth: I have no intention of making myself look ridiculous in

that outfit.” (71)

It is a fact worth sympathizing with that these men consider their predecessors a bunch of good-for-nothings. According to them, even

their traditional attire was worth laughing at. These men do not want to wear traditional clothes for the fear of being linked to their predecessors. They would rather prefer the modern dress code to propagate their modern thoughts. If there was anything they liked about them, it was their remoteness, impersonal attitude and their ability to make the common man fear them.

Their speeches are as senseless as their dress sense. Unlike the previous leaders, they would rather have algebraic equations in their speech and not proverbs and verses.

“Nor proverbs nor verbs, only ideograms in algebraic quantum. If the square of $XQY(2bc)$ equals QA into the square root of X , then the progressive forces must prevail over the reactionary in the span of .32 of a single generation.” (72)

This speech has no head or tail. The speaker is not concerned about what he wants to convey. He merely wants to sound good and knowledgeable. This factor of “sounding” modern indeed puts a huge question mark on the values and ideals of Kongi and his men. They are fabricated individuals who portray their superficial knowledge in a manner, which is far from commendable.

These men do not think highly of their rituals either. Kongi and his

men wish to alter the New Yam festival. As the Fourth Aweri states in a meeting with other members;

“I think I see something of the Leader’s vision of this harmony. To replace the old superstitious festival by a state ceremony governed by the principle of Enlightened Ritualism.

It is therefore essential that Oba Danlola, his bitterest opponent, appear in full antiquated splendour surrounded by his Aweri Conclave of Elders who, beyond the outer trappings of pomp and ceremony and a regular supply of snuff, have no other interest in the running of the state.

Sixth: Who says?

Fourth: Kongi says. The period of saws and wisdoms is over, superseded by a more systematic formulation of comprehensive philosophies—*our* function, for the benefit of those who still do not know it.” (81)

The leader’s vision being referred to is in-fact, Kongi’s vision regarding the New Yam festival wherein he wants Oba Danlola to present him with the New Yam. In this manner, the old superstitious festival will be replaced. It is noteworthy that these men have no thoughts of their own. They merely mimic whatever Kongi says. When stating that

the “period of saws and wisdoms is over,” they are implying that under Kongi’s rule, the old-fashioned crude instruments will no longer be used. Instead, new machines will take the place of saws. There is nothing wrong with the introduction of machinery however, the thought that these things should be done away with does put a question-mark on the thoughts of these men who scoff at the ways of their elders. Similarly, they rightly point out that the age of wisdom is over. Undoubtedly, under Kongi’s rule, men are more prone towards nonsensical floral speeches rather than speeches that make a point. Their “systematic formulation of comprehensive philosophies” is rather thrusting unto the people of Isma their new ways and means.

In order to establish Kongi’s supremacy, the Aweri’s wish Oba Danlola to hand over the yam himself to Kongi. The Fourth Aweri states:

“And Danlola, the retrogressive autocrat, will with his own hands present the Leader with the New Yam, thereby acknowledging the supremacy of the State over his former areas of authority spiritual or secular. From then on, the State will adopt towards him and to all similar institutions the policy of glamorized fossilism.” (81)

The words “glamorized fossilism” again go onto show that Kongi

and the Aweri's are more concerned about using complex phrases that do not make sense. Using such phrases according to them, is a sign of modernity. Comical as it may sound, their modernity is an impropriety. Whatever this policy means, it is important and should be noted as it exposes Kongi for what he is-a man of double talk and a user of conflicting innuendoes. The use of the oxymoron "glamourized fossilism" is an attempt to confuse and deceive the people because the alluring charm of glamour is hardly a befitting description of a fossil, a prehistoric and outdated trace of an animal part or an imprint of the same.

Kongi's style of naming his men as the Reformed Aweri Fraternity brings to mind the ceremonial positions carved out for our traditional rulers by the modern rulers. These chiefs are contended with their new titles and a token fee as bait to unwittingly relinquish their traditional powers to the new elites.

An interesting fact is that the members of the Aweri group do not see eye to eye. They are constantly at each other's necks. A topic of concern is that the Aweri's are fasting only to give their leader company and at the same time are complaining about it too. The Fifth Aweri states:

“---Why the hell couldn't Kongi do his fasting alone?

I'll tell you why. He loves companions in misery.

First: Look man, enough of you. You didn't have to come.

Fifth: Yah? I'd like to see any of us refusing that order." (82)

Quite obviously, Kongi's men fear him. The starving is a part of the Five-Year Development Plan of Isma. This plan requires the citizens to starve today so that they may be overfed tomorrow. Again, this plan of Kongi's is very absurd and very illogical. It is senseless to starve and then overfeed because naturally, when a person is fasting and then given food the individual tends to eat more than he or she would under normal circumstances. In that case, the intake will supercede the supply in store. Obviously, this theory is a total failure as far as logic is concerned.

Kongi's attitude to certain enterprises in Isma is a negation of his "Development" policy and hence, ironical to his official position. The competition between Kongi's Farm Co-operative and Daodu and his men illustrates this fact. Daodu's private venture yields more successful results than Kongi's and one would have expected a good and sincere government to give such an enterprise a pat on the back. However, the situation is a complete contrast under Kongi's rule. His government is not happy with Daodu's success. Instead of Daodu's bountiful harvest being viewed as a positive contribution to the existence of the new government in office, it is viewed as a magnifier of the shortcomings of the state. The

Secretary is bitter about Daodu winning the competition and bitterly states:

“That noise, just because they won
 The New yam competition. God, and that
 Is one more black mark against
 My performance today. I did my best
 To rig the results in favour of
 The state co-operatives, but that man
 Anticipated every move. And then his yam!
 Like a giant wrestler with legs
 And forearms missing. If only I had
 Thought of it in time, I would have
 Disqualified him on the grounds
 Of it being a most abnormal specimen.” (121-122)

Very clearly, Kongi and his men do not have good intentions towards the state and men of the opposite party. Daodu is a man of Oba Danlola and since he has won the competition, it is taken as a failure for Kongi and his men. The Secretary is well aware that since Daodu has won, Kongi is bound to give him a “black mark” for allowing such a situation to arise. This shows the hypocrisy in Kongi’s rule.

In another incident, Kongi goes to the extent of hiring members of the Aweri Fraternity to write books for which he claims authorship. When discussing about his speech for the festival with the Secretary, Kongi's attitude as a feigned author is clearly brought to light. The conversation is about the Aweri's quarreling to write and is as follows:

Kongi: -----You should have seen

them during the writing of my last book. I couldn't think for the squabbles.

Secretary: Oh that must have been plain jealousy.

Kongi: Jealousy? Of whom are they jealous?

Secretary: Of one another, my Leader. You shouldn't give your books to only one person to write.

Kongi: Really? But he's the best disputant of the lot. I like his style. You shall hear the Harvest speech he's prepared for me. Four and a half hours---no joke eh?

Secretary: Well, it causes dissension. At least let one of the others select the title or write the footnotes.

Kongi [*pleased no end*]: Dear, dear, I had no idea they were so jealous. Very disturbing. I like harmony you realize. But I never seem to find it. And among my philosophers especially,

there must be perfect harmony.

Secretary: Then write more books. Write enough to go round all of them.

Kongi: Oh, would that be wise? I wouldn't want to be mistaken for a full-time author.

Secretary: Your duty to the country, and to the world demands far more works from you than you produce at present.

Moreover, it will make your theoreticians happy.

Kongi: Hm. I think I'll trust your judgement. Tell them they can begin work on my next book as soon as the new one is released.

Secretary: Who is to write it my Leader?

Kongi: Let them toss for it." (90-91)

The conversation is an eye-opener as it discloses Kongi's shallowness. Apart from the fact that Kongi uses his men to write books under his name, he also is very pleased by the thought that his men quarrel over him. The act of tossing a coin to decide who will be the author of his next book is very childish to say the least. It is a matter of irony that such a man holds a prestigious title of a President. Although he claims to be a lover of harmony he is in complete contrast with the term. Afterall, how can one overlook the ghastly crimes that are committed by

his men and by his command?

In another incident, Kongi complains that he does not want to have photographers around him during the Harvest Festival (a supposed show of modesty), but we later see him through a series of "Last Supper" poses having pictures after pictures taken of him. During this, the Secretary mentions probable and possible captions for each of the shots that would befit a publication at the New Yam Festival while Kongi poses again and again and pretends to be wary of the entire episode. This act of modernity invokes a belly laugh and goes on to prove further Kongi's double standards.

What finally shatters the life-giving image of Kongi is Daodu's speech on the day of the New Yam Festival. He says:

"This trip, I have elected to sample the joys of life, not its sorrows, to feast on the pounded yam, not on the rind of yam, to drink the wine myself, not leave it to my ministers for frugal sacraments, to love the women, not merely wash their feet at the well. In pursuit of which, let this yam, upon which I spent a fortune in fertilizers and experiments with a multitude of strains, let it be taken out, peeled, cooked, and pounded, let bitter leaf-soup simmer in the women's pots and

smoked fish release the goodness of the seas; that the Reformed Aweri Fraternity may belch soundly instead of merely salivating, that we may hereby repudiate all Prophets of agony, unless it be recognized that pain may be endured only in the pursuit of ending pain and fighting terror. [*Handing over the yam to Danlola*] So let him, the Jesus of Isma, let him who has assumed the mantle of a Messiah, accept from my farming settlement this gift of soil and remember that a human life once buried cannot, like this yam, sprout anew. Let him take from the palm only its wine and not crucify lives upon it.” (127-128)

This is a very fine speech depicting the actual image of Kongi. Instead of a Messiah of peace, he is in-fact a devil's incarnation. Daodu has called Kongi and his men “Prophets of Agony” because of their heinous crimes and brutal dealings in Isma. He states quite clearly that he has come to the festival to hand over the precious yam, which is a result of his hard work to Kongi, who poses as a Messiah of peace, making it quite clear that Kongi thrives on the hard work of others. He wishes to remind Kongi that once a human life is destroyed it cannot spring back to life unlike the yam. In short, he is reminding Kongi of the many murders he has committed. He points out very clearly that Kongi can impose his

rule on Isma but he should not in the process kill innocent people. In a further attempt to ridicule Kongi, Daodu showeres him with a rain of adjectives and curses;

“-----curses on all inventors of agonies, on all Messiahs of pain and false burdens-----[*with mounting passion*]. On all who fashion chains, on farmers of terror, on builders of walls, on all who guard against the night but breed darkness by day, on all whose feet are heavy and yet stand upon the world----On all who see, not with eyes of the death, but with the eyes of Death.....” (45)

The speech above shatters Kongi's image and clearly presents Kongi for what he is; a dealer of death and a man who has only his interest at heart and not the state's. Kongi's modern government is more like a plague from which the people of Isma have no escape, they have to succumb to him and his orders.

Oba Danlola on the other hand, is a detainee but a man who has nerves of steel as he opposes the rule of Kongi. Oba Danlola had during his rule, his group of Aweris. They were a body of wise men whose consent was a must for the proper functioning of the land. Although Oba Danlola has been in prison for a year, his spirits have not dampened. He

still believes that his people are with him because he is a symbol of his culture, an identity for his people. His people regard him with utmost respect. For example, when the Superintendent intervenes Danlola's merry-making, he asks Sarumi to warn him of the consequences. However, Sarumi dismisses his proposal by stating;

"We do not hear the jackal's call
When the Father speaks." (63)

It is worth noting that even though the Superintendent is Kongi's man and pretends to be a follower of his ways, he is aghast when Oba Danlola gestures as if to prostrate before him. The Superintendent is aware that an Oba is like a god and therefore, fears a curse falling upon him lest the Oba should bow down before him. He states;

"I did not make any impious demands of you.

All I asked was for more respect to constituted authority.

I didn't ask for a curse on my head.

Danlola: Curse? Who spoke of curses?

To prostrate to a loyal servant of Kongi- is that a curse?

Superintendent: Only a foolish child lets a father prostrate to

him. I don't ask to become a leper or a lunatic. I have no wish to
live on sour berries.

Danlola: All is well. The guard has waived

His rights and privileges. The father

Now prostrates himself in gratitude.

Superintendent [*shouting*]: I waived nothing. I had nothing to

waive, nothing to excuse. I deny any rights and beg you not to
cast subtle damnations on my head.

Danlola: Oh but what a suspicious mould

Olukori must've used for casting man.

Subtle damnations? If I was

Truly capable of that, would I

Now be here, thanking you for little

Acts of kindness flat on my face?

[*Again his act*]

Superintendent [*forestalls him by throwing himself down*] : I call

you all to witness. Kabiyesi, I am only the fowl droppings that

stuck to your slippers when you strolled in the backyard. The

child is nothing; it is only the glory of his forebears that the

world sees and tolerates in him." (65-66)

Obviously, although the Superintendent pretends to be a follower
of the European ways, although he is dressed in a khaki uniform with

brass buttons, it is evident that his exterior is a mere garb of make believe. He too believes that an Oba is like god and therefore, does not wish to a curse falling on him by allowing Oba Danlola to prostrate before him. It is interesting to note that Oba Danlola is well aware of the power he generates. The Superintendent is a man of Kongi however; at heart he is still very much Yoruba.

Oba Danlola ridicules Kongi's legislations for they do not only interfere where they should not, but also break down human beings. A hint of this is given during the preparations for the festival. While getting ready for the festival, Sarumi calls on Danlola, prostrating in the traditional manner but Oba Danlola discourages him saying:

"Get up, get up man. An Oba Grade I

By the grace of Chieftancy Succession

Legislation Section II, nineteen-twenty-one

Demands of you, not this lizard posture

But a mere governmental bow—from

The waist, if you still have one." (108-109)

Oba Danlola is merely joking with Sarumi. He is definitely not ashamed of Sarumi prostrating before him but is on the contrary cajoling Kongi's lack of respect for elders and ridiculing the Leader's principle of

a modern bowing style. He condemns Kongi's ways and means and in another instance says:

“----As the Man

Himself has often screamed, we are

A backward superstitious lot, immune

To Kongi's adult education schemes.” (103)

Danlola definitely does not intend to say that he is superstitious and backward. He is rebuking Kongi's thoughts since Kongi regards him as such. Danlola reprimands Kongi's modern thoughts, which are completely alien to him and are as such, against Yoruba ways.

As an Oba, Danlola has at heart, the interest of his Yoruba clan. It is for this reason that he agrees to hand over the new yam to Kongi. As it is, Kongi has set the condition that if Oba Danlola hands over the new yam, three detainees will be freed. The Yoruba custom demands an Oba to hand over the new yam to the Spirit of Harvest however, for his people, Danlola is ready to commit a sin by handing Kongi the yam. Clearly, Danlola thinks of his people like a true Yoruba chief, unlike Kongi who uses his men as appendages to achieve all that he wishes to under his European constitution.

Danlola is well aware of the fact that he is fighting a lost battle.

However, he is still up and firm against Kongi and his rule. He states;

“I know we are the masquerade without

Flesh or spirit substance,.....” (106)

Oba Danlola refuses to give up his Yoruba ideals and is such an epitome of his culture in which he believes firmly. He has no doubt in his mind about his outcome as he himself remarks;

“If the young sapling bends, the old twig

If it resists the wind, can only break.” (123)

Danlola is referring to himself as the “old twig” and to Kongi as the “young sapling.” And as Danlola is unwilling to bow down before Kongi’s new set of rules and regulations and modern amendments, he knows that he’ll have to either die or stay in prison for the rest of his life.

Oba Danlola aims at conserving his Yoruba principles whereas Kongi aims at replacing all Yoruba rituals with British ones. Kongi is contemptuous of Yoruba rites, as he does not believe in them. Oba Danlola scorns Kongi and scorns the new state. When Danlola realizes that he’ll be killed if he stays in Isma, he flees the land. It is a tragic end and it is interesting to note that Kongi’s men flee Isma too, as they fear being killed after the episode during the festival.

Exile here is a modern way of de-dramatizing tragedy. The drama

ends leaving us in stupefaction before the emptiness of the character who embodies the destinies of a people and indeed, a tragic shudder runs through us to see the fabricated image of the leader.

The drama portrays an interesting clash between two leaders and what they stand for. Although Oba Danlola has lost his battle and flees the land, it goes to his credit that he stood up for his Yoruba beliefs. Even though he eventually fled the land, what matters is his thought in taking a stance against Kongi and his modernity.

The play has been aptly titled "Kongi's Harvest" because Kongi presides - through the entire play. Kongi's rule asserts itself more forcefully than ever. In this drama, Soyinka does not delude himself and neither does he delude his audience. He wishes to make an important statement that it is not easy to overthrow tyranny. However, he encourages gestures of defiance against European norms in the form of Daodu, Segi and Danlola.

Notes and references

¹ One of the biggest festivals celebrated by the Igbos. It is celebrated in the month of August of each year. The individual Igbo communities each have their days for this august occasion. This day symbolizes the conclusion of a work cycle and the beginning of another. Invitation to the new yam festival is usually open to everyone. What this means, is that there is abundant food for not just the harvesters but also for friends and well wishers. A variety of festivities mark the eating of new yam. These festivities include cultural dances.

On the last night before the festival, yams of the old year are gotten rid of by those who still have them. This is because it is believed that the New Year must begin with tasty, fresh yams instead of the old dried-up crops of the previous year. Before the festival starts, the yams are offered to gods and ancestors first before distributing them to the villagers. The ritual is performed either by the oldest man in the community or by the king. They eat the first yam because it is believed that their position gives them the privilege of being intermediaries between their communities and the gods of the land. The rituals involved in the new yam eating are

meant to express the community's appreciation to the gods for making the harvest of their yams possible.

At the new yam festival, only dishes of yam are served since the festival is symbolic of the abundance of the produce. So much of it is cooked that, no matter how heavily the family eats or how many friends and relatives they invite, there is always a so much food left over at the end of the day.

² Wole Soyinka, "Collected Plays Volume 2," Oxford University Press 1974.

³ Black, glistening snake.

⁴ Longing to speak.

"THE TRIALS
OF BROTHER JERO"

Chapter 4: "The Trials of Brother Jero."

4.1 Summary of the Drama and a general outlook of the characters.

Wole Soyinka produced this play just before Nigeria's independence in the year 1960. The play reflects the developments in Nigerian affairs and it also questions the motives of the leaders, both spiritual and parliamentary who were settling to positions of power during that time.

According to Duro Ladipo, Soyinka wrote this drama over a weekend in response to a request from the Student's Dramatic Society for a one-act drama. Apparently, the Arts Theatre at University College at Ibadan was undergoing alterations and therefore, the play had to be suitable for production in the dining-room of one of the halls of residence, on an improvised stage and with minimal lighting sources. In this play, Soyinka has penned down his experiences based on separatist sects in Abeokuta, Ibadan and Lagos. In addition, he has also made use of knowledge he gathered through his mother, of Yoruba women traders. Soyinka was well aware of the influence wielded by the prophets or the praying church leaders over powerful members of the community,

including those of the parliament. He also knew that since independence for Nigeria drew nearer, the influence of the prophets would be crucial.

The central theme of this drama is religion. Religion in this play is used to highlight social tensions prevalent in Nigeria. Furthermore, religion is used as a term of collective expression of the frustrations of a social group. It is also the projection of the group's desires and sometimes of its political will.¹ This play deals with religion as becoming a means of expressing national sentiments especially as the new churches break away from their mother churches from the European metropolis. This is done in order to adapt their rites to the African environment and in this case, the Yoruba environment. According to James Colemon, in Nigeria, during the mid-thirties, numerous dissident churches, among them, the Cherubim and Seraphim sect, attest to the growth of a feeling of African identity.² Thus, religious charlatanism is the subject in "The Trials Of Brother Jero." The play itself is divided into five scenes. The first scene

"reveals the Prophet, a heavily but neatly bearded man;

his hair is thick and high, but well-combed, unlike those of

*most prophets. Suave is the word for him. He carries
a canvas pouch and a divine rod.³ He speaks directly
and with accustomed loftiness to the audience.”* (145) The

prophet happens to be Brother Jeroboam, also referred to as Brother Jero and he is a beach prophet. In the monologue being delivered to the audience, Jero reveals that he was a prophet “by birth and by inclination.” (145) He has established himself over an area of Victoria Beach in Lagos after outwitting his mentor. In order to establish his territory at the beach, he had to fight against the powerful rival sects of Cherubims and Seraphims. In addition, to win the battle he used cheap underhand means by employing a campaign of six dancing girls dressed as Jehovah’s witnesses. His expertise lies in making false prophecies and in exploiting his group of followers. Jero tells us that he has to struggle to get a new convert since people are more inclined towards high life and television. At this point, the old prophet whom he had ousted, comes and curses him stating:

“Ingrate! Monster! I curse you with the curse of the
Daughters of Discord. May they be your downfall. May the
Daughters of Eve bring ruin down on your head!” (146)

Jero thinks of this curse as a “very cheap curse”. He confesses that he has a soft spot for women but ever since he came into this profession, he has kept his guard. When relating his story he goes on to say:

“-----I woke up one morning and the first thing to meet my eyes was a daughter of Eve. You may compare that feeling with waking up and finding a vulture crouched at your bedpost.” (147)

This is how the first scene ends. In the first scene, Soyinka applies the Brechtian technique by bringing the Old prophet out of the past onto the stage. Another technique, which Soyinka has applied, is Jero’s direct address to the audience. This is something that Soyinka has never used in his plays before and has not done so after this play either.

The second scene introduces Amope and Chume riding on a bicycle. They are a couple and Amope is full of complaints about her husband. She has come to take money that Jero has been owing her for the past three months and is determined to take one pound, eight shillings and nine pence for the velvet cape which she gave to Jero. Amope is an aggressive and practical woman. She is the only woman in the play who is not fooled by Jero. She chides Chume by calling him an ordinary chief

messenger. Chume flees away from her bicker batting unaware that the man who owes her money, is none other than Brother Jero. He is an ardent follower of Jero and thinks very highly of him.

Meanwhile, Jero opens the window of his hut to get a breath of fresh air but he is aghast at the sight of Amope. In order to avoid her, he tries jumping out from the window. However, his attempt to escape is futile as Amope calls out to him asking him where he was going. She asks him to give her the money that he owes her. Jero tries convincing her that he is a man of God and that Amope should not stop him. Jero's talk does not impress her, as she is adamant to get what she wants. Towards the end of the scene Jero escapes as Amope is busy talking to a trader of smoked fish. The scene ends with Amope shouting after him and calling him

“A thief of a Prophet---.” (152)

The third scene opens on the beach where Jero, in a conversation to himself, tells us of his high ambitions. He wishes to be called by various prestigious names, for example;

“-----the Velvet hearted Jeroboam. Immaculate Jero,
Articulate Hero of Christ's crusade-----.” (153)

This scene also shows the shallowness of Jero, who considers his

followers as customers. Moreover, he candidly admits that he keeps his followers dissatisfied so that they can always come back to him. During the conversation, a young lady passes by after having had a bath. Lustful as Jero is, he follows her with his hungry eyes. However, the moment he realizes that he is falling prey to temptation, he immediately falls to the ground to "pray for strength against temptation." (154) Chume enters at this point and seeing Jero pray for strength, he too, joins in. The scene is comical as Chume is shown asking for permission to beat his wife just once. Jero refuses only to keep him dissatisfied. The scene also highlights the fact that Jero makes very safe prophecies; ones that will not get him into trouble. He states:

"----This one

who always comes earliest, I have prophesied that he will be

made a chief in his home town. That is a very safe

prophecy. As safe as our most popular prophecy that a

man will live to be eighty. If it doesn't come true,

that man doesn't find out until he's on the other side."

(157)

Jero's followers start coming into the church. Amidst the prayer, a drummer boy enters being chased by a lady. Jero asks Chume to conduct

the prayers while he goes off to settle the confusion in the church. When he returns, his clothes are tattered and his face is bleeding. Quite clearly, the women beat him regardless of the fact that he was a man of God. Towards the end of the scene, during a conversation with Chume, Jero comes to realize that the woman whom he owes money is none other than Chume's wife. In order to get rid of her, Jero gives Chume the permission to beat her. He is well aware that in doing so, Chume will be satisfied and will no longer come to him. However, he analyses that it is a small price in order to get rid of Amope. This scene highlights Jero's double talks, his lust for women and the fact that he is a scheming rogue since he plays upon the minds of simple people.

The fourth scene opens in front of the Prophet's home. Chume is shown

"wiping off the last crumbs of yam on his plate." (163)

Amope is at her usual habit of chiding Chume. This time however, Chume answers her by asking her to shut her mouth. At first, Amope is stunned at this sudden change in her husband. She feels he has gone mad. When she realizes that her husband is not insane, she tries to run away, to take shelter in Jero's home. Eventually, Chume becomes aware that Jero lives in the hut. It is then that he understands why Jero gave him the

permission to beat Amope. Finally, he leaves Amope at Jero's hut giving her the instructions that she should not budge from the place until he comes back.

The fifth and final scene opens on the beach where a member of the parliament is practicing his speech. Jero enters and states that this member comes daily to practice his speech but never delivers it to the public, as he is scared. Jero tries to impress him but his attempt is a total failure at first as the member is not at all impressed with him. Jero does not give up. He impresses the member by giving a lofty speech about the country and its state. The words that win him over are:

“-----It is a position of power. But are you of the Lord? Are you in fact worthy? Must I, when I have looked into your soul, as the Lord has commanded me to do, must I pray to the Lord to remove this mantle from your shoulders and place it on a more God-fearing man? [*The Member moves forward unconsciously. The Prophet gestures him to stay where he is. Slowly---*] (169)

Yes-----I think I see Satan in your eyes. I see him entrenched in your eyes-----“ (169)

The member grows fearful and advances towards him. As Jero

continues with his fallacies, Chume enters accusing him of having an illicit affair with his wife. He chases Jero with a cutlass. Meanwhile, the member thinks that Jero has vanished miraculously. In the end, Jero summons the police to arrest Chume and thereafter put him in a lunatic asylum. The curtains draw with the Member of Parliament clearly under Jero's power, who prostrates before Jero crying "Master." Thus, the triumph of Jero is complete.

The characterization in the play is interesting. Although Jero is a villain, a rogue, the entire story centers around him and in this respect, he can be called the hero of the drama. The aspects of his nature are brought to light in the second part of this chapter in detail.

The minor characters in the play comprise Chume, Amope, the congregation and the Member of Parliament. Amope as discussed earlier, is the only character in the play who is not fooled by Jero. Her first appearance in the drama is on a bicycle with Chume. She is not happy with her husband and constantly chides him. She is materialistic and desires greater wealth and this can only be achieved by Chume's promotion. However, Chume is not possessed in the manner in which she is to derive wealth. Her anger with Chume is seen in the dialogue below regarding his position as a Chief Messenger;

“---A Chief Messenger in the Local Government Office----do you call that work? Your old school friends are now Ministers, riding in long cars----.”
(149)

In another incident, Amope gets scolded by a Sanitary Inspector and while relating the whole incident to Chume she says;

“A messenger’s pay isn’t much you know----just in case you’ve forgotten you’re not drawing a minister’s pay. So you better think again if you think I’m letting my hard-earned money stay in the hands of that good-for-nothing. Just think, only this morning while I sat here, a Sanitary Inspector came along. He looked me all over and he made some notes in his book. Then he said, I suppose, woman, you realize that this place is marked down for slum clearance. This to me, as if I lived here. But you sit down and make your wife be exposed to such insults.

And the Sanitary Inspector had a motor-cycle too, which is better than a bicycle.” (164)

Amope’s conversation always veers round to her husband no matter what the situation is. In the above paragraph she is referring to Jero as the “good-for-nothing.” She is a nagging woman and her

husband, Chume is a hen-pecked husband.

Another aspect of Amope's character is that she is aggressive. She has come to Jero's hut and has literally planted herself outside his door only to get her money back. The money incidentally is what Jero owes her for the velvet cape. She is least bothered about Jero's position and is adamant to get back her money as the following conversation reveals;

"Amope: One pound, eight shillings and nine pence for three months. And he calls himself a man of God. [*She puts the notebook away, unwraps the brazier, and proceeds to light it preparatory to getting breakfast.*

The door opens another foot.]

Jero: [*Coughs*] : Sister-----my dear Sister in Christ----

Amope: I hope you slept well, Brother Jero-----

Jero: Yes, thanks to God. [*Hems and coughs*] I ---er--- I hope you have not come to stand in the way of Christ and his work.

Amope: If Christ doesn't stand in the way of my work."

(150)

Amope is a shrewd woman no doubt, and at the same time, she has to be praised since she is not fooled by Jero's talks. Indeed, she has a

pivotal role in the play. It is because of her that Chume comes to realize that Jero is a fake prophet and it is then that he chases Jero with a cutlass.

Chume as discussed earlier, is victimized by his wife and by Jero as his best dupe. At the end of the play, it is implied that Chume will be arrested and put into a mental asylum. There is barely anything worth sympathizing with him since he has no opinion of his own.

It is because of his lack of intelligence that he wishes to thrash his wife. As it is, he can never outwit her with his tongue therefore, he wishes to derive victory through beating her. A scene depicting his anguish is as follows; the scene takes place when Chume brings her along on his bicycle and suddenly applies brakes. Amope puts on an act as though her ankle has broken because of his carelessness. Here is how she bitterly condemns him;

“Amope: [*Her tone of martyrdom is easy, accustomed to use.*] I suppose we all do our best, but after all these years one would think you could set me down a little more gently.

Chume: You didn't give me much notice. I had to brake suddenly.

Amope: The way you complain----anybody who didn't see

what happened would think you were the one who broke an ankle. [*She has already begun to limp.*]

Chume: Don't tell me that was enough to break your ankle.

Amope: Break? You didn't hear me complain. You did your best, but if my toes are to be broken one by one just because I have to monkey on your bicycle, you must admit, it's a tough life for a woman.

Chume: I did my----

Amope: Yes, you did your best. I know. Didn't I admit it?--“

(147-148)

Clearly enough, Chume does not have the wits to outdo her. He does not have the intelligence to argue with his wife and defend himself and his actions.

Another aspect of Chume's character is that he is materialistic. This is clearly visible when Jero asks him to conduct the morning prayers. He says;

“Chume: Give us money to satisfy our daily necessities.” (160)

From the above statement, it is clear that Chume has been lured to

Christianity since he feels that it is the mode of achieving all that he wishes too.

Through Chume's character, Soyinka wishes to imply that men like him deserve to be exploited by Jero.

The congregation is a group of people who are motivated by greed. Even the woman who is childless has ulterior motives. Jero says about her;

"-----She wants

children, so she is quite a sad case. Or you would think so.

But even in the midst of her most self-abashing convulsions, she manages to notice everything that goes on around her. In-fact, I better get back to the service.

She is always the one to tell me that my mind is not in the service." (157)

Therefore, the lady is not merely a passive victim of Jero but an insincere lady in her penitence as well.

The Member of Parliament in the play is a coward who shies away from delivering a speech in the Federal House. He is a self-seeking individual who only wishes to have a seat of power in the Government. Soyinka has used this character to portray the shallowness of high-

ranking public servants. Apart from high ambitions, they too are as venal and as stupid as Jero's other dupes. The characters in this play are well defined. Even though the members of the congregation and of the Parliament have very little roles, their characterization is one that is vivid and there are no confusions about it. Chume, Amope and Jero are all round figures. That is to say, there is nothing that is not clear about their ways, means and mannerisms. In this manner, the play is very well written and brilliantly brings out the conflict of cultures through its characters.

4.2 Clash Of Cultures in “The Trials of Brother Jero.”

In this play the cultural clash is brought out by means of religion. That is to say Christianity versus Yoruba tradition. Jero represents the modern Nigerian society. He stands for the new order of Christianity, which has already set its feet on the traditional Yoruba culture.

Being a beach prophet, Jero's mission is to get new followers. He gives us a very clear picture of prophets of his kind in the paragraph below.

“I am a prophet. A prophet by birth and by inclination.

You probably have seen many of us on the streets, many with their own churches, many inland, many on the coast, many leading processions, many looking for processions to lead, many curing the deaf, many raising the dead. In fact, there are eggs and there are eggs.” (145)

Quite obviously, prophets seem to be swarming the land in multitudes propagating Christianity. What is even more alarming is that Jero considers his job as a trade. He states;

“And I grew to love the trade. It used to be a very respectable one in those days and competition was dignified. But in the last few years, the beach has become fashionable, and the

struggle for land has turned the profession into a thing of ridicule. Some prophets I could name gained their present beaches by getting women penitents to shake their bosoms in spiritual ecstasy.” (145)

The idea of appointing women to lure crowds is degrading and questions the newfound religion as a whole. It also raises a doubt about the character of pastors who go to any extent to gain followers. The word “fashionable” only goes on to show that Christianity is a modern apparatus that is used to outdo the Yoruba culture. Jero goes on to confess that there are many Prophets of his kind who make false prophecies.

Jero considers his followers as customers and plays on their simplicity. He says in a monologue;

“I am glad I got here before any customers___ I mean worshippers----well, customers if you like. I always get that feeling that I am a shopkeeper waiting for customers. The regular ones come at definite times. Strange, dissatisfied people. I know they are dissatisfied because I keep them dissatisfied.” (153)

In another scene, he describes how he makes prophecies that are

safe. He states on the arrival of his followers:

“They begin to arrive. As usual in the same order. This one who always comes earliest, I have prophesied that he will be made a chief in his home town. That is a very safe prophecy. As safe as our most popular prophecy, that a man will live to be eighty. If it doesn’t come true, that man doesn’t find out till he’s on the other side. So everybody is quite happy. One of my most faithful adherents---unfortunately, he can only be present at week-ends---firmly believes that he is going to be the first Prime Minister of the new Mid-North-East-State---when it is created. That was a risky prophecy of mine but I badly needed more worshippers around that time.” (157)

There is nothing wrong in being a pastor however, Jero’s motive of being one is suited to his interest. He is a scheming man who is well aware that he can become a man of power and pomp by gaining the confidence of the people. He deceives them with his sugar talks and fake promises. As Christianity, a European weapon, has already been introduced in the country, Jero knows that people are lured towards things that are fanciful. He also knows that the people who come to him

are materialistic therefore, he conveys to the community that this religion is a means of getting all that they desire. At the same time, Yoruba prayers and songs are conducted during a mass to express national sentiment. This is indeed the pagan interpretation of Christianity. Jero presents himself as a mystic by communicating with the spirits through palm-wine. In addition, he mingles with a Christian vocabulary, animist concepts that give proper life to trees, roads and the palm wine. Among his followers, Chume is the most prized customer that he has. He has taught Chume how to conduct prayers during mass. Chume, who is a Chief Messenger fell easily to the charms of Jero. Of him, Jero says;

“He is too crude, but then that is to my advantage. It means he will never think of setting himself as my equal” (155)

The conversation below reveals the shrewdness of the propagator of Christianity who is pacifying Chume so that he does not beat his wife.

“Chume: Just once. Just one sound beating, and I swear not to ask again.

Jero: Apostate. Have I not told you the will of God in this matter?

Chume: But I have to beat her, Prophet. You must save me from madness.

Jero: I will. But only if you obey me.” (155)

He goes on to brag about his prophecies ever since Chume came into his service. The vile Jero says;

“Brother Chume, what were you before you came to me?

Chume: Prophet----

Jero [sternly]: What were you before the grace of God?

Chume: A labourer, Prophet. A common labourer.

Jero: And did I not prophesy you would become an office boy?

Chume: You do am, brother. Na so.

Jero: And then a messenger?

Chume: Na you do am, brother. Na you.

Jero: And then a quick promotion? Did I not prophesy it?

Chume: Na true, prophet. Na true.

Jero: And what are you now? What are you?

Chume: Chief Messenger.

Jero: By the grace of God! And have I not seen you at the table of the Chief? And you behind the desk, giving orders?” (155-156)

The trick of predicting the predictable is not a trick at all. Jero has used religion as a means of foreseeing the obvious. He is a nefarious

crook in the costume of a pastor. He has an analytical mind and is aware that Chume is crude and a person who is easily fooled. Therefore, it was easy for him to state the obvious regarding Chume's promotions. He used basic knowledge and presented it to Chume as a word of God. Crude and gullible as Chume is, he thought that Jero was indeed, a man of God, gifted with powers of foresightedness. It is this gullibility that attracted Chume to an alien religion and he adapted himself to it whilst discarding his own religion as pagan.

Although Chume has converted himself into a Christian his Yoruba roots spring up from time to time. For example usage of pidgin words like; "Na" and "am" in the quotation above highlight his Yoruban language. Although Chume thinks of himself as a part and parcel of Christianity, his language is mingled with words of his own mother tongue. He truly believes that Christianity can deliver to him things that he has always longed for. He states in a prayer amidst a congregation:

"----Tell our wives not o give us trouble. And give us money to have a happy home. Give us money to satisfy our daily necessities. Make you no forget those of us who dey struggle daily. Those who be Clerk today, make them Chief Clerk tomorrow. Those who are messenger today, make

them Senior Service tomorrow. Yes Father, those who are Messenger today, make them Senior Service tomorrow.

[The Amens grow more and more ecstatic.]

Those who are petty trader today, make them big contractor tomorrow. Those who dey sweep the street today, give them their own office tomorrow. If we day walka today, give us our own bicycle tomorrow. I say those who dey walka today, give them their own bicycle tomorrow. Those who have bicycle today, they will ride their own car tomorrow.

[The enthusiasm of the response, becomes, at this point, quite overpowering.]

I say those dey push bicycle, give them big car tomorrow. Give the big car tomorrow. Give them big car tomorrow, give them big car tomorrow.” (160)

The response of the crowd becomes more and more ecstatic at the mention of materialistic goods. It is quite visible that Chume is not alone in thinking that Christianity can deliver all these things. The crowd in the church is evidence that they too, truly believe in the new religion that promises to offer them what their own religion cannot. Clearly enough, the crowd is at a confluence of the two religions. They are neither totally

Christian at heart nor are they Yoruba. Instead, they mix these two religions according to their own convenience. The cultural clash is obvious.

At the same time, there are people who do not think much about Christianity or about the people who propagate it. For instance, the woman who barges into the church, running after a drummer boy. In this incident, Jero went as a man of God to pacify things. However, when he tried to intervene, the woman had no hassles in beating Jero. He went as a pastor and emerged

“a much altered man, his clothes torn and
his face bleeding.” (161)

He states;

“Who would have thought that she would dare life her
hand against a prophet of God.” (161)

Obviously, the woman did not care about the prophet of God. Another woman who does not think highly of Jero and his religion is Amope. She represents the Yoruba culture.

Her entire mission in the play is to get back from Jero what he owes her. Fairly enough, she seems to be the sort of woman who can confront the man of God and can even manhandle him if the need arises.

This attitude is totally against any Christian towards a pastor. A Yoruba Christian would have let the matter rest and might not have even charged Jero a penny for the cape, but not Amope. This is evidence enough to label Amope a Yoruba. Her statement to the man of God is;

“Listen you bearded debtor. You owe me one pound, eight and nine. You promised me you would pay me three months ago but of course you have been too busy doing the work of God. Well, let me tell you that you are not going anywhere until you do a bit of my own work. “ (150)

She is not charmed by Jero and his talks and his bearded appearance does not hinder her from demanding what is rightfully hers.

When Jero manages to escape, Amope shouts after him;

“Help! Thief! Thief! You bearded rogue. Call yourself a prophet? But you’ll find it easier to get out than to get in.”

(152)

When Amope has had an argument with the fish-seller and gives a beggar boy a piece of her mind, she states;

“ I don’t know what the world is coming to. A thief of a Prophet, a swindler of a fish seller and now that thing with lice on his head comes begging for money. He and the Prophet

ought to get out together with the fish-seller as their mother.”

(152)

Although Amope is not highly educated and still a rustic in her ways, it is commendable that she has recognized Jero for what he is. Rightly enough, he is a beggar in the disguise of a Prophet. His way of begging may have a certain difference that is to say, he begs for more followers, more customers but he is a beggar all the same. The only difference is that he has used religion as a way of begging for the power which he desires the most.

Jero has well employed tools that cast an impression. He has a

“-----white flowing gown and a

very fine velvet cape, white also. Stands upright, divine rod in

hand, while the other caresses the velvet cape.” (152)

Thinking of Amope he tells us about his surety regarding the payment. He says;

“-----When I bought

the goods of her, she did not even ask any questions. My

calling was enough to guarantee payment. It is not as if this

was a well-paid job. And it is not what I would call a luxury,

this velvet cape which I bought from her. It would not have

been necessary if one were not forced to distinguish himself more and more from these scum who degrade the calling of the Prophet. It becomes more important to stand out, to be distinctive. I have set my heart after a particular name. They will look at my velvet cape and they will think of my goodness. Inevitably they must begin to call me-----the Velvet hearted Jeroboam. [Straightens himself.] Immaculate Jero, Articulate Hero of Christ's Crusade-----

Well, it is out. I have not breathed it to a single soul, but that has been my imagination___ because the imagination is a thing of the spirit___ it must catch the imagination of the crowd. Yes, one must move with modern times." (152-153)

This is a very important confession that Jero makes. Since his heart is set at high ambitions, achieving high names, it is only Christianity through which he can fulfill his desires and dreams. As he himself says that one should move with modern times, more specifically European times, therefore it is all the more necessary to be dressed according to the changing times. In addition, he states that since people are more attracted to the outer appearance it is all the more important for him to dress with perfection. Apart from the competition amongst false prophets, Jero also

has to compete with high living and television sets. He says;

“The worshippers have dwindled to a mere trickle and we really have to fight for every new convert. They all prefer High Life to the rhythm of celestial hymns. And televisions too is keeping our wealthier patrons at home. They used to come in the evening when they would not easily be recognized. Now they stay at home and watch television.”

(146)

It is very clear that all modern amenities have been introduced into what used to be a rural area. High standards of living and modern television sets are some of the things which have set their feet on Yoruba ways. Wealthy people have come under the trance of the idiot box and there is most definitely erosion of the culture that existed once upon a time.

To present himself as the perfect saint, he has conveyed a picture of himself sleeping on the beach to Chume and his followers. He says;

“-----My disciple believes that I sleep on the beach, that is, if he thinks I sleep at all. Most of them believe the same, but for myself, I prefer the bed.

Much more comfortable. And it gets rather cold on the beach

at nights. Still it does them good to believe that I am something of an ascetic-----“ (155)

Jero has left no stone unturned to portray himself as the perfect pastor. He has successfully been able to employ Christianity as a tool to outdo Yoruba tradition and at the same time to serve his selfish motives.

The play is a successful combination of farce, characterized by slapstick incidents, concealed identities and neat coincidences. It has brilliantly observed and sharply realized details of Yoruba life. The vitality of the play is partly a result of the appeal and personality of Brother Jero, who, from his very first speech establishes a special relationship with the audiences. Although he is a liar, a hypocrite and a cheat, his disconcerting honesty has won him friends on every stage that he has stepped unto. Part of his attraction lies in his eloquence; he can, for example, adopt an ornate and ecclesiastical register, full of high-minded statements, rhetorical flourishes and visionary insights. To the MP he recalls a vision;

“I saw this country plunged into strife.

I saw the mustering of men, gathered in
the name of peace through strength.

And at a desk, in a large gilt room,

great men of land awaited your
decision.” (169)

These lines have won Soyinka the title of a Prophet. The audience delights in knowing that this is only the public side of Jero's personality, that he has a weakness for women and that he often emerges from encounters with them, his face scratched and his clothes torn. Such is the vigorous theatricality of this character that Soyinka wisely resurrected him fifteen years later, fifteen years in which Jero had become the most popular theatrical character in English-speaking Africa.

After the first production of “The Trials of Brother Jero,” several undergraduates at Ibadan expressed their outrage at what they considered Soyinka's attack on Christianity. Since then, the play has been assessed more calmly, and the targets of the cultural clash have been correctly identified as the hypocritical and the gullible; those who allow themselves to be lead astray by religion. The play, as mentioned earlier, indicates the spiritual confusion and by extension, the political naivete of many of the playwright's countrymen and fellow human beings.

Criticism in this play has often been directed against the ending which has been termed abrupt and inconclusive. However, given the nature of the occasion for which this play was written, the ending is

perfectly valid. It is true that a bleak and sinister mood has been created in the final scene, but it is appropriate. As it is, Soyinka was writing for a nation that was about to become independent and about whose future and leaders of the futures he was deeply concerned. Religious charlatanism is the main subject in this play highlighted by Soyinka and it can be said that he has succeeded in bringing the subject out brilliantly.

This drama can be said to be a step forward than the other two that is, "The Lion and the Jewel" and "Kongi's Harvest." This is because, while in the previous two dramas an implication of European concepts had been perceived, in "The Trials of Brother Jero" apart from the British means, Christianity also seems to have come in full flow. We now here of Christian abbreviations like "Brother" Jero, Jesus and the other characters of the Bible mentioned as the epicenter of the play. In "The Lion and the Jewel," we did have Lakunle mention characters from the Bible but they were mere references. In this manner, with each progressive play, the clash of cultures also seems to be advancing a foot further. It is interesting to note this and in the coming chapter, which happens to be "Jero's Metamorphosis," the cultural complications pile up as we will see.

Notes and references

¹Wole Soyinka's four plays, viz. "The Trials of Brother Jero," "The Swamp Dwellers," "The Road" and "The Strong Breed" have at the centre of their intrigue a religious problem.

²James Colemon, "Nigeria: Background to Nationalism," Berkely, 1958, 32

³A metal rod about eighteen inches long, tapered, bent into a ring at the thick end.

"JERO'S
METAMORPHOSIS"

Chapter 5: "Jero's Metamorphosis."

5.1 Summary and Characterization

This play is an extension, as mentioned in the previous chapter of "The Trials of Brother Jero." The play was published in the year 1973 and as such, during this period Nigeria was under the military regime of General Yakubu Gowon. It is important to keep this time phase in mind for a better understanding of the drama.

The entire drama centers round the prophets whose profession is under threat. This is basically because the beach on which they preach is going to be transformed into a tourist spot. In doing so, all the prophets will run out of business since their services will no longer be needed.

Jero is seen in this drama battling against all odds to establish firmly his position and power. The drama is again, a very interesting one since religion is used once more to serve selfish interests.

This is again a one-act play like "The Trials of Brother Jero." and comprises three scenes in totality. The main character of this play is quite obviously, Brother Jero. Other characters in the drama are Sister Rebbecca, Ananaias, Chief Executive Officer, Clerk to the Tourist Board,

Chume, Major Silva, Shadrach, Caleb, Issac, Matthew and a Policewoman.

The first scene immediately gives a picture of the promotion in stature of Jero as compared to what he was in "The Trials of Brother Jero." The scene starts thus;

"Brother Jero's office. It is no longer his rent troubled shack of The Trials but a modest whitewashed room, quite comfortable. A 'surplus-store' steel cabinet tucked in a corner. On a cloth-covered table is an ancient beat-up typewriter of the oldest imaginable but functioning. A vase of flowers, the usual assortment of professional paraphernalia__bible, prayer book, chasuble, etc., etc. On the wall, a large framed figure at a battery of microphones indicates that Jero's diocese is no longer governed by his old friends the civilian politicians. As Jero dictates, striding up and down the room, it is obvious that he has his mind very much on the photograph. A demure young woman, is seated at a table taking the dictation." (176)

Clearly, Jero's business seems to have flourished from what it used

to be. Jero is dictating a letter of importance to his secretary, Sister Rebecca. His words are troubled as he says

“-----in time of trouble, it behoves us to come together, to
forget old enmities and bury the hatchet in the head of
the common enemy.-----“ (176)

The letter is meant to be given to all prophets urgently. We learn from Jero that most of the prophets have a bad case history. That is to say, they have broken the law more than once. Apart from this, Jero reveals the purpose of the meeting is to

“find a way to stop this threat to our vocation.” (176)

The vocation of the prophets it is implied is in danger. Throughout the scene, Sister Rebecca agrees whole-heartedly with whatever Jero says. Like Chume, she too is a blind follower of Jero. She says to Jero;

“I trust you. I follow wherever you lead me, Brother
Jeroboam.

Jero: I shall lead you to safety, you and all who put their
faith in me.” (177)

Jero plays with her sentiments in the same manner with which he played upon Chume's as the above dialogue reveals. The meeting is scheduled to take place at eight in the night. Jero then leaves so that he

can prepare for the meeting. Before leaving the cabin, he tells Rebecca;

“But we shall win, Sister Rebecca, we shall win. Because I have already the best ally on my side. Here, in this room. [*Going, hesitates, moves towards the vase of flowers and raises it to his face, sniffing delicately with his eyes shut.*] And I thank you for brightening up my humble shack with these flowers, even as you have lightened my life with your spiritual lamp.” (178)

Outside his cabin, he spies on Sister Rebecca to check her reactions after what he said. Very clearly, Jero has not changed. His cheeky tongue still knows how to make coy remarks, how to win over gullible minds. When he is in the process of spying on Sister Rebecca, a fellow prophet named Ananaias happens to catch him. He tells Jero that Jero will be needing all his wily wits to save him as

“The City Council have taken a final decision. They are going to chuck us out. Every last hypocritical son of a devil.” (179)

But Jero is neither surprised nor shocked, as this news is stale for him. He says;

“That is old news, Ananaias. And for some of us it

doesn't matter of course." (179)

Ananias suggests getting violent if anybody dares to throw out prophets but Jero candidly states;

"Violence will not help us. I am calling a meeting tonight at which all these matters will be discussed. The good Lord shall help us find a way.

Ananias: Calling a meeting? You already have something up your sleeve or you wouldn't be calling a meeting. Come on, let's have it. Let's be partners, you and me.

Jero: Tonight. " (179-180)

After their departure, the Chief Executive Officer of the Tourist Board of the City Council emerges from a hiding place followed by the Clerk to the board and a policewoman. It is comical to note that a man of the position of a Chief Executive Officer can stoop to the level of spying. He clarifies

"-----It is not in my character to skulk and hide until a mere charlatan is out of the way. I prefer to confront him squarely even if he's the devil himself." (182)

The main aim of the team is to get the an important official file

which Jero has manipulated to get under his wings. When the team barges into Jero's office, Rebecca confronts them. The scene is comical as Rebecca veers round to God all the time. Obviously, the Officer is irritated no end as the dialogues below reveal.

“Executive: Miss Denton----

Rebecca: My name is Rebecca.

Executive: I do not believe, young lady, that we are on Christian terms.

Rebecca: I do not believe that you are on Christian terms at all, sir. Your soul is in danger.” (183)

In another instance he splutters;

“Can't anyone shut up this religious maniac?” (183)

Rebecca has such a passionate feeling for Christianity that she seems to go into convulsions while praising the Lord. The Executive Officer cannot handle her insanity. He makes a move to go out of the office however; Ananias makes a sudden appearance blocking the door. Eventually, seeing himself cornered, the Executive Officer flees through a window in the office. His Clerk follows suit and thus ends the first scene.

This scene sets the base for the rest of the play. It is very

noticeable that Jero has climbed upward on the rungs of the ladder of success. His plush office, his Secretary all happen to be his assets including all latest equipment.

Compared to the previous chapter, in this scene, it is the Executive Officer who flees through the window. In the previous chapter it was Jero who used the window as an escape from Amope. Sister Rebecca serves Jero the same purpose that Chume used to. The only other new aspect in this drama is that of survival of the profession of prophets. This new facet is in-fact, the base of this play. How Jero succeeds, if he does, will be seen in the forthcoming scenes.

The second scene shows

“A portrait of the uniform figure, in a different pose, hangs over the veranda of the house where Chume lives in rented rooms.” (187)

Chume is practicing on a trumpet trying out notes of a hymn. He is part of the Salvation Army band. Apparently, Chume learnt music from Captain Winston, who happens to be a white man. On this day however, Captain Winston is absent and Major Silva has come to tutor Chume.

Chume is not very comfortable being taught by another person and he clearly says,

“It is much better for a man to have
only one teacher. I begin get used to Captain Winston
and then somebody else comes. Captain Winston
understand how to teach me.” (188)

He is reluctant on being taught by someone else because he is not
literate as far as music is concerned. Apparently, he was reading the notes
upside down. When Major Silva corrects him, he loses his temper and
finds fault with him. Chume states,

“So I am illiterate now? I am illiterate? You are illiterate yourself.
Illiterate man yourself.” (189)

Major Silva pacifies him by stating that as good Christians, they
should not lose anger. They begin practicing again and Chume begins
dancing too.

*“Chume continues and does not notice
Brother Jero who enters and, after a despairing shake of
his head, with his usual calculating gesture, steps into
the dance with him. Chume becomes slowly aware that
other legs have joined his, his movement peters to a
stop and he follows the legs up to the smiling,
benevolent face of Brother Jero. Chume back off.”* (192)

Chume is not too happy seeing Jero before him. He is shocked to say the least and angry as well. Afterall, it was because of Jero that Chume had to spend three months in a lunatic asylum. Chume feels that if he had succeeded in putting his cutlass inside Jero's head and was hanged he would have become a saint and a martyr for accomplishing such a feat. Jero once more tries practicing his magic on Chume through the power of words. He says;

"You want to make this world a better place? Good. But to get hanged in the process? And perhaps in public? For whom? For the sake of people like Major Silva? People who don't even understand the musical soul which the Lord has given you?" (193)

Jero is aware that for Chume, music is his soul. He uses this knowledge to his advantage and the words that win Chume over are;

"Praise the Lord for the gift of reason and the gift of life. Then praise him also for the coming promotion, yes, your coming promotion for this is the glad tidings of which I am the humble bearer." (194)

At the word "promotion" Chume becomes all ears and willingly follows Jero like he once used to. Jero raises his expectations further by

saying that Chume is a holy prophet and goes on to call him "Brother" Chume. Thereafter, Chume once more becomes the most prized follower that Jero has and follows Jero blindly.

The second scene ends in this manner. Jero is a scheming man who has succeeded in taking Chume under his wings once more. The gullibility of Chume is shocking. Chume has once more become a tool fit to be used by Jero. The trance like state in which Chume follows Jero depicts his foolishness once more.

The third and final scene takes place in

"The front space of Brother Jero's headquarters. Loud chatter among a most bizarre collection of prophets.

Sister Rebecca emerges from the house carrying the portrait from the office and hangs it against the outer wall. The desk and chair have already been moved out of the office for the meeting. Rebecca takes a chair to a most unbending individual who stares straight ahead and keeps his arms folded. He is the only one who seems to abstain from the free-flowing drinks, the effect of which is already apparent on one or two."(197)

The "unbending individual" is Shadrach, another beach prophet

who is not very happy with the fact that the meeting has already been delayed and that Brother Jero was not personally present to welcome him. He makes an attempt to stage a walkout. The prophets present do not see eye-to-eye and it is very clear that they have no qualms about it. They argue over trivial matters which is least befitting to their position. At the same time, it is satirical to note that the gathering comprises cut-throats, sex maniacs and murderers in the garb of prophets.

Eventually, among the entire ruckus, Brother Jero makes his entry. Isaac, another beach prophet is the first to say;

“We have waited two hours, Brother.” (199)

Jero asks for forgiveness in his fox-like manner and orders for more drinks. He then gets down to the main aim of the meeting, the tourist spot. Most of the beach prophets, on sensing danger to their profession, agree on one common point. The point being that they should not allow the tourist place to be erected. Brother Jero points out that the Cabinet who has passed the proposal of the tourist spot has mentioned

“-----, one respectable religious

denomination be licensed to operate on the Bar Beach.

Such a body will say prayers before and after each

execution, and where appropriate will administer the last rites

to the condemned. They will be provided a point of vantage where they will preach to the public on the evil of crime and the morals to be drawn from the miserable end of the felons. After which their brass band shall provide religious music.” (202)

The religious music obviously is intended to be provided by the brass band of the Salvation Army. Brother Jero plans on the Bar beach becoming

“-----the single execution arena, the sole amphitheatre of death in the entire nation.” (203)

He also states on acquiring a spiritual monopoly by forming just one single religious body called the Church of the Apostolic Salvation Army of the Lord. The idea is agreed upon readily by all. Hereafter, Jero insists that the spiritual body will need an image and the head should be called a General. The only person who is not very happy with the turn of events is Shadrach. Eventually the Executive Officer turns up in the meeting followed by his Clerk. Negotiations take place and Brother Jero gets his papers signed by the executive. Shadrach is ousted and Jero has his way.

The entire body is formed like an army. There happens to be in this

party, Brother Chume who is re-christened by the name Brother Joshua. The General is none other than Jero himself. All other beach prophets happen to acquire different army ranked names and different powers. They are more than happy on being a part of the spiritual body in one form or the other. Brother Jero now becomes General Jero as he says;

“After all, it is fashion these days to be a desk General.” (213)

This is how “Jero’s Metamorphosis” ends. The sole aim of the meeting, in the meeting conducted by Jero has been achieved. He has firmly established his foothold on the Beach. Now it becomes clear that the reason he wanted Chume was because he wanted someone to head the brass band and clearly enough, Chume was the best option. Also, throughout the play, the “uniformed figure” referred to is none other than Jero in the dress code of a General. His ambition to become a General has been fulfilled and his task of setting up his own territory on the beach has also been accomplished.

The characterization of Jero has already been discussed in the previous chapter of “The Trials of Brother Jero.” In this chapter there is no change in his character. In fact, he seems to have mastered himself in his trade of being a prophet. His trade has earned him all materialistic things that he yearned for. That is to say, a plush office and a good living

are all but the perks of his trade.

Chume in this play has not transformed either. Even after spending three months in a lunatic asylum, he remains feather brained and his gullibility has not seized. He is not a sympathetic figure. Instead, one tends to wonder how he allows himself to be taken for a ride ever so often. His reasoning powers do not seem to exist. Through him, Soyinka wishes to point out that people like Chume , a society comprising people like him will always be and has always been exploited by people like Jero.

The other mirror image of Chume in this play is Sister Rebecca. She was a Confidential Secretary with a speed of

“Eighty words per minute, sir, one hundred and twenty shorthand-----.” (184)

However, she gave up her position only to be bamboozled by a fake like Jero. She does come across as a spiritual maniac who does not see beyond Jero’s costume for the man that he really is.

Other beach prophets like Ananias, Shadrach, Caleb and Matthew all nurse selfish interests. It is because of these interests that they have been lured towards the profession of being beach prophets. More will be discussed about them in the second part of this chapter.

This drama of Soyinka was as much a success as its counterpart, that is, "The Trials Of Brother Jero." Soyinka used this drama to highlight the social conflict prevalent in Nigeria during the time of the independence of Nigeria. He also made a very bold statement about the kind of rule that his country was under. Towards the end of the play, when Jero dresses up as a General, the satire was made towards General Yakubu Gowon. There is no doubt about the nature of the General in question. Clearly enough, he was a hypocrite and Soyinka did not mince words to say the same. Soyinka has directly ridiculed the false prophets and the mimics of the antics of power. The conclusion of the drama presents the caricaturistic symbol of the rising regimes of Nigeria.

Although Soyinka's presentation is horrifying, it compels us to laugh at the quality of new leadership and the new Messiahs. The callousness demonstrated in Jero's plan is basically based on commercializing human interests and this is what Soyinka has brought to notice.

5.2 Clash of Cultures in “Jero’s Metamorphosis”

The cultural clash in this drama centers around religion. Its theme is similar to its counterpart, that is “The Trials Of Brother Jero.” Although the theme is similar, the objective of the play is different. That is to say, in this drama the beach prophets are battling for their positions to be established firmly on the beach. As it has been mentioned earlier that the beach is to be converted into a tourist spot and as such, a tourist spot would not need the services of religious maniacs.

In “The Trials of Brother Jero,” modernization was confined to the arrival of a new religion. In this drama the horizons of modernity seem to have expanded as the very first chapter conveys. Jero’s office is no longer what it used to be instead it has been converted to a “modest whitewashed room.” (175) His office boasts of having a typewriter and a photograph of a uniformed figure at a battery of microphones. Apart from all the modern assets that he has, he also has the privilege of having a Secretary, another modern amenity. We learn from Jero that many of his fellow prophets have a bad case history, that is to say the majority of them were pick-pocketers, thieves and some were murderers. Jero says of them;

“To fraternize with those cut-throats, dope-pedlars, smugglers, and stolen goods receivers? Some of them are ex-convicts do you know that?” (176)

Quite obviously, the trade of coming into the profession of a prophet seems to have grown stronger with time. Christianity has definitely come into Nigeria with full gusto. With Christianity, old Yoruba ways have been nearly done away with. What is ironical is that although Nigeria as a country has progressed in terms of latest gadgets, it has become a loser on the moral front. The prophets are in-fact criminals. This again highlights the fact that with new ways and means, the people of Nigeria are getting lured to high life and high life has brought with it its vices too. As individuals all prophets are at each other's throats but since they are in danger of being ousted from the beach, Jero wants to manipulate them. He states;

“ ----We could do with the elevation to eternity of some of our dearly beloved brother prophets on the beach, and if they choose the way of the hangman's noose or elect to take the latest short cut to heaven facing a squad at the Bar Beach show, who are we to dispute such a divine solution?” (175)

Knowing Jero it is clear that he is not at all interested in elevating the position of his brother prophets. He is interested in monopolizing his position through the medium of religion. The Bar Beach show which he is referring to is a popular expression used for the new fashion of public executions in Lagos, the capital of Nigeria. This term again gives an indication of the changing lifestyles. Earlier on, punishment was decided by a group of leaders. Now however, after the British have set in their rule and made Nigeria their colony, rules have changed. Nigerians now follow what the British have introduced to them. That is to say, capital punishment is given according to the new rules and regulations.

Although Jero poses as an image cut above the rest and an epitome of Christianity, he uses Yoruba proverbs from time to time. He states:

“ ---The hole in a poor man's garment
is soon filled with the patchwork of pride, so resolutely
does Nature abhor a vacuum.” (176)

The lines Jero used above is in-fact part of a Yoruba proverb. What is ironical is that Jero knows the pulse of his Nigerian countrymen and is well aware of their weaknesses. Although he poses as a Messiah of Christianity he mingles both the Yoruba and Christian cultures to lure the people towards him. Afterall, it is this knowledge of his that allows him

to earn his daily bread. He is a corrupt man and there is no doubt about it. The previous chapter highlighted his weakness for women and this chapter highlights his love for hard drinks. It is preposterous to think of a man of his esteem indulge in such acts but he maneuvers everything to his convenience. The first scene gives a clear indication of his vices where he is dictating a letter to Rebecca.

“Rebecca: Oh Brother Jero, you say such wise things.

Jero: I have but little gifts, Sister Rebecca but I make the most of them. Yes, let the phrase read__after much prayer for guidance, I am inspired to invite you all to a meeting where we shall all, as equals before God and servants of his will, deliberate and find a way to stop threat to our vocation. In our own mutual interest__underline that heavily_in our own mutual interest, I trust that all shepherds of the Lord whose pastures are upon this sandy though arable beach will make it their duty to be present.

[He shakes his head as if to clear it, goes to a small cupboard and brings out a bottle. Pouring a drink]

The gall is bitter, Sister Rebecca. The burden is heavy upon me.” (176)

Jero has not changed in terms of nature and character. In-fact what has changed is his gimmick of propagating Christianity to nurse his selfish interests. In the lines above, Jero took a drink under the false pretence of feeling heavily burdened. The truth is that he indulges in hard drinks for his pleasure and to cast a favorable impression on Rebecca he cooks up a false excuse. There is nothing wrong in drinking however, what is wrong is his false pretext of drinking. Jero does not have any respect for his religion and for the religion which he propagates. He is merely using both the religions to lead his countrymen astray.

The Nigerian nation has transformed completely from what it used to be earlier on. People are not only adapting to new religion but condemning those who still follow Yoruba rites and rituals. The scene where Rebecca reprimands the executive showcases the same. It is as follows;

“Executive: Miss Denton-----

Rebecca: My name is Rebecca.

Executive: I do not believe, young lady, that we are on Christian name terms.

Rebecca: I do not believe that you are on Christian terms at all, sir.

Your soul is in danger.

Executive [*splutters badly and explodes*]: My religious state is no concern of yours, young woman.” (182)

It is understood from the conversation held above that the Executive does not think very highly of Christianity and those who follow it. It is also very clear that Rebecca does not think highly of the Executive who is still a pagan according to her. The situation is satirical since both the parties concerned are Nigerians. What is even more ironical is although Rebecca condemns the Executive as a pagan and the Executive condemns her for being a Christian, the Executive is a tool in the hands of the European rule and Rebecca is a tool of the European religion. This is indeed a cultural clash wherein both parties are fighting for what they believe is right. The truth is that both these people fail to understand that they are in-fact mere puppets in the hands of modernity. The situation is ironical but the situation exists.

Sexual advances seem to be an order of the day in the modern Nigeria. This can be seen in the following dialogues of the same scene;

“Clerk: That was how the prophet got her. He wasn’t even addressing her at all but the C.E.O who came to serve him notice. He kept preaching at him all the time but she was the one who got the message. Christ sir, you should

have seen her convulsions!

Executive: Why the hell did he bring her in the first place?

Rebecca: Hell is true sir. I was living in hell but did not know it until Brother Jero pointed the path of God to me.

Executive: I was not addressing you, woman.

Clerk: She was his private secretary-----

Executive: I know she was his private secretary, damn you-----

Rebecca: He will not be damned sir, the Lord is merciful.

Executive: Can't anyone shut up this religious maniac? I asked, why bring her along? Do you see me here with my private secretary?

Rebecca: I shall answer that question. When you are saved you, you are no longer afraid to tell the truth. My boss asked me to come with him to take note, but in my heart I knew that he was planning to seduce me.

Executive: What! You dare slander a senior government official of my department in my presence? I shall order an investigation and have you charged with-----

Clerk: Don't, sir. It's the truth. The C.E.O. has had his eyes on her a long time. Wouldn't let her alone in the office,

making her do overtime even if there was no work to do, just to try and---." (184-184)

This new advancement in terms of modernity puts a question mark on the entire system which happens to operating in Nigeria. Although the Executive Officer is a representative of the new government in Nigeria, he makes a remark regarding Rebecca which is very true. He says to her;

“---You had enough will-power to resist the revolting advances of a lecherous Chief eviction Officer on the rampage, you are trusted sufficiently to be assigned an official duty which is most essential to our national economy and what happens__ you permit yourself to be bamboozled by a fake prophet, a transparent charlatan---.”
(184)

Although the remark is directed towards Rebecca it holds true for the majority of Nigeria. Afterall, if the people of Nigeria had known the difference between truth and lies, prophets like Jero would never have swarmed the land. It is alarming that a few handful of prophets can lead a nation astray.

The Executive further elucidates his point thus;

“They have to be evicted. They stand in the way of

progress. They clutter up the beach and prevent decent men from coming here and paying to enjoy themselves. They are holding up a big tourist business. You know yourself how the land value has doubled since we started public executions on this beach.” (185)

This statement given by the Executive is just as alarming as Jero's religious chants. Progress according to the Executive and people like him, means deriding the country of its religious rites regardless of the rites being Yoruba or Christian. Since Nigeria is under imperial rule, all things seem to have a monetary value attached to them. The new government believes in charging the public for pleasure. The latest public pleasure, it seems, lies in watching public executions. The idea is bizarre and horrifying too. Under Yoruba tradition, the Obas used to decide the penalty of the culprit involved. In this modern age however, Obas have been done away with. Politics and Parliament are the new order of the day and the society. Society too, is no longer simple. People want to live life king-size and enjoy everything to the hilt. Bribery, both monetary and sexual is a part and parcel of the new European rule. Traditional values have been eroded and the morality of the people is degrading.

Ananias happens to give a very clear image of the existing

society. Although his statement is directed towards Rebecca, he conveys an image of the present scenario. He says;

“----Protect her

from bribery, oh Lord! Protect her from corruption! Protect her from iniquities known and unknown, from practices unmentionable in thy hearing. Protect her from greed for promotion, from hunger for stripes, from chasing after citations with actions over and beyond the call of duty.

Save her from harassing the innocent and molesting the tempted, from prying into the affairs of men and nosing out their innocent practices.” (186)

Ananias's speech though comical, gives an exact picture of Nigeria and the conflict which it is undergoing. People have become corrupt, they vie for promotion and for power. Those in power harass and molest the innocent. Undoubtedly, this situation is pathetic. What is more pathetic is that the nation is at a crossover of two different ideologies. The Yoruba ideologies almost cease to exist while its counterpart seems to thrive. A hybrid of both the cultures seems to be springing up and in the process, all that is good and traditional is seen fading.

A trumpet has replaced the Nigerian instruments like the juju

guitar. When Chume is learning music by an Englishman called Silva, he tries to relate it with the traditional food. He says;

“Enh, pepper. When you cook soup you go put small pepper. Otherwise the thing no go taste. I mean to say, ‘e go taste like something. Afterall, even sand-sand get in own taste.

But who dey satisfy with sand-sand? If they give you sand-sand to chop you go chop?

Silva [*beginning to doubt his senses*]: Mr. Chume, if I tell you I understand one word of what you are saying I commit the sin of mendacity.

Chume: What? You know wetin pepper be? Captain Winston, as soon as I say pepper ‘e knows wetin I mean one time.

Silva: I do not know, to use your own quaint expression, wetin musical pepper be, Mr. Chume?

Chume: And condiments? Iru? Salt? Ogiri? Kaun? And so on and so forth?

Silva: Mr. Chume, I’m afraid, I don’t quiet see the relevance.

Chume: No no, no try for see am. Make you hear am

[*Blows a straight note.*] Dat na plain soup. [*Blows again, slurring into a higher note.*] Dat one na soup and pepper. [*Gives a new twist.*] Dat time I put extra flavour. Now if you like we fit lef am like that. But suppose I put stockfish, smoke-fish, ngwam-ngwam---

Silva: If you don't mind I would just as soon have a straightforward rehearsal. We have no time for all this nonsense.

Chume: Wait small, you no like ngwam-ngwam or na wetin? Na my traditional food you dey call nonsense?" (190)

Chume in this scene represents Yoruba society which is trying to find its stance in the new atmosphere. As it is, Chume does not know how to read music. His earlier trainer, Mr. Winston was a white man but he related music to Chume with the Yoruba food. In this manner, it was easy for Chume to pick up the nuances of European music. Major Silva however, is not at all impressed with Chume relating European music with Yoruban food. We have once more the cultural clash presented in this incident. Chume still speaks in pidgin like he used to in "The Trials of Brother Jero." He is hurt by the fact that Major Silva holds no respect for Yoruba food whereas he is trying his level best to master English

music. To soothe himself and to take revenge Chume turns the tune of his trumpet into a traditional one and starts dancing to it.

When Jero enters, he manages to win Chume over once more. It is strange that a hypocrite like Jero calls white men hypocrites. He says;

“A white man. He is not one of us. And you know yourself he’s a hypocrite. All white men are hypocrites.” (193)

Although Jero agrees to the fact that white men are not like them, what he fails to justify is that why he and people like him are following ways of the white men. They are setting up a concoction of two cultures and in the process, confusing gullible minds like Chume. People fail to understand that they are just a means for getting what Jero desires most; power. Jero lures Chume with dreams of promotion and high-life of spirituality.

Jero succeeds in acquiring a spiritual monopoly of the prophets and by captivating the public. To elevate his position further, Jero announces the

“birth of the first Church of the Apostolic Salvation Army of the Lord!” (205)

He then christens the fake prophets according to ranks in the army.

He doles out worthy titles like Major, Lieutenant-Colonel, General. All

these titles conform to the norms of the present society, a society that craves for position and power at the cost of buffoonery.

As if all this is not enough, Jero reveals the monopoly of the people in Parliament to construct

“Beauty parlours, supermarkets, restaurants, cafés
and ice-cream kiskos, fair grounds, construction and
hiring of beach huts, amusement gadgets, gambling
machines and dodgems and roundabouts and parking
facilities—for the new

National Amphitheatre to be built on the Bar Beach.”

(209)

The final tumult that Jero has is;

“----We intend to restrict
ourselves to spiritual matters. We will not contradict the secular
image.” (211)

The remark made by Jero is petrifying. As it is, the Parliament is hell bent on eradicating all huts and symbols of Yoruba life. Sky scrapers and technology is the main concern of the Parliament. There is nothing wrong with a nation's progress. In this case however, the progress is more inclined towards personal interests. The new government is on the

verge of increasing tourism but has completely shut its eyes to the fact that tourism like all things in life has its pros and cons. There is no harm in erecting high rise buildings but eradicating huts in doing so is questionable. Similarly, although there is no harm in being a prophet but being a fake prophet is questionable and leading people astray is a crime. In this drama, people are led wayward by religion and by progress. In the process, their own identity ceases to exist.

Soyinka has portrayed the cultural clash in a humorous manner. This play was as successful as its counterpart and it did send shock waves among people who saw it. As it is, Soyinka has not minced his words and has objected to the new European rulers and those Nigerian rulers who do not have the benefit of a nation in mind when carrying out their duties. He has also given a very clear picture of the kind of prophets which existed. Rapists, pickpockets, thieves and charlatans all seem to have taken up the disguise of a prophet to hide their true colours. It is tragic that an entire nation should pay for the deeds of a few so-called intelligent minds.

"MADMEN AND SPECIALISTS"

Chapter 6 : “Madmen and Specialists.”

6.1: Summary and Characterization

“Madmen and Specialists” is a tragic satire of mankind immersed in irrational war. The war depicted in this play is quite undoubtedly, the Nigerian civil war that took place from 1967-1970. Soyinka first spoke about the Nigerian civil war in his play titled “A Dance of Forests.” In Madmen and Specialists, Soyinka explores the spiritual, psychic, physical and symbolic devastation of humanity during war times. There are scenes of poverty struck people, a nation at the verge of being deformed and a people that are plunged into darkness.

The play comprises two parts that is, Part One and Part Two. The first version of the play was performed in 1970 at the Playwright’s Workshop Conference at the Eugene O’Neill Theater Center, Waterford, Connecticut, U.S.A. The version, which I am dealing with, is in-fact, the first complete version that had its premiere at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria in March 1971. The University Theatre Arts Company performed it.

The characters in the play include four Mendicants namely; Aafaa, Blindman, Goyi and Cripple. The central character in the play is Dr.

Bero, who is the Specialist. The other cast includes Si Bero who is the sister of Dr. Bero, the Old Man who is Dr. Bero's father, two earth mothers named Iya Agba and Iya Mate and a Priest.

In Part One, when the play opens, the four Mendicants are seated by the roadside. The four Mendicants have each been physically deformed and at the same time, have been psychologically damaged.

They are gambling away and are putting at stake their body parts. The thought of putting at stake body parts is gruesome but the four Mendicants do not seem the least bit bothered. The scene is as follows;

"The Cripple has just thrown the dice.

Aafaa: Six and four. Good for you.

Cripple: Your turn, Blindman. [*Gives the dice and gourd to Blindman.*]

[*Blindman throws.*]

Five and five. Someone is going to give us fivers.

Goyi: Fat chance of that. [*He throws.*]

Aafaa: Three and two, born loser. What did you stake?

Goyi: The stump of the left arm.

Cripple: Your last?

Goyi: No, I've got one left.

Blindman: Your last. You lost the left stump to me yesterday.

Goyi: Do you want it now or later?

Blindman: Keep it for now.

Cripple: When do I get my eye, Aafaa?

Aafaa: Was it the right or the left?

Goyi: Does it matter?

Aafaa: Sure it does. If it's the right one, he can take it out now. The left is my evil eye and I need it a little longer." (217)

The conversation above depicts the grim atmosphere in Nigeria. As it is, these men have already lost some of their body parts in the War. Their names suggest that too. For example, Cripple drags himself on his knees and has only two stumps left of his arms. Goyi is limbless and

"is held stiffly in a stooping position by a contraption which is visible just above his collar." (217)

Aafaa suffers from St. Vitus spasms¹ whereas Blindman had his eyes blown out during bombing.

They are gambling when Si Bero enters

"carrying a small bag from which protrude some twigs

with leaves and berries."(218)

Goyi asks Si Bero for a few pennies, as his entire team has not eaten that day. Si Bero throws a penny to Goyi and tells his team that if they want more money they should come and sort out herbs. When she walks away, the Mendicants shout blessings after her and eventually also state;

"God bless your brother!" (220)

We learn from the Mendicants that her brother is a cold-blooded murderer who is presently the head of intelligence. He has his own laws and dictates. The government in Nigeria is unjust and serves its own selfish means without bearing in mind the welfare of the nation. Just to give a picture of the present leader and the leadership, the Mendicants hold a mock trial.

"Aafaa [*in a ringing voice*]: You are accused.

Blindman: Satisfied?

Cripple: Fair enough.

Blindman: Bang!

[*Goyi slumps*]

Aafaa [*rinising his hands*]: Nothing to do with me.

Blindman: Fair trial, no?"

Aafaa: Decidedly yes.

Blindman: What does he say himself?

Goyi: Very fair gentlemen. I have no complaints.

Blindman: In that case, we permit you to be buried.

Goyi: You are generous, gentlemen. I have a personal aversion to vultures.

Aafaa [posing]: In a way you may call us vultures.

We clean up the mess made by others. The populace should be grateful for our presence, [*he turns slowly round*] If there is anyone here who does not approve us, just say so and we quit. [*His hand makes the motion of half-drawing out a gun.*] I mean, we are not here because we like it. We stay at immense sacrifice to ourselves, our leisure, our desires, vocation, specialization, et cetera, et cetera. The moment you say, Go, we---[*He gives another inspection all round, smiles broadly, and turns to the others.*] They insist we stay.” (220-221)

The mimicry provides an illuminating statement about the unjust treatment given to the common people by the powers in the government especially the soldiers. The scene shows the hypocrisy of the leaders who

are unwilling to leave the government posts once they have got it. The scene also gives a vivid picture to the denial of justice to a common man and the dictatorial attitude of the leaders in power.

After having discussed this "fair trial," the Mendicants set off to their new mission which is to follow Si Bero and spy on her. The main reason for them going to her place is to see if they can come across any official secrets and to eavesdrop on Si Bero.

When they reach Si Bero's home, she is busy talking with Iya Mate and Iya Agba. These two old women are earth mothers and had send Si Bero on an errand to gather berries. Si Bero is quite perturbed about the well being of her father and her brother as she has not heard from them for quite some time but the women assure her that they will be coming back home soon and that they all will be celebrating by drinking palm-wine. The Mendicants come on the pretext of sorting out herbs and Si Bero asks the Blindman to help her place sacks inside her home. The other members grow more suspicious and are sure that something fishy is brewing inside her hut. Just when the Mendicants are fooling around as usual Dr. Bero, the Specialist, makes his first personal appearance. There is

"Bero, a uniformed figure carrying a holdall." (230)

The Mendicants go towards him and we learn that it was Dr. Bero who had asked them to spy on his sister and to prevent her from going into the cellar of the house. Dr. Bero states;

“---I didn’t send you to the house to fight. I asked you to keep your eyes open and keep her from going down. [*He looks at them with contempt, then jerks his thumb in the direction of the cellar.*.]” (231)

The Mendicants are not particularly in a good mood as they are on an empty stomach and Aafaa is an outspoken person. His outspokenness leads him into an argument with Bero. He questions the very Bero on his being a specialist and says;

“You know nothing, Dr. Bero. You can’t bluff me.” (232)

He is rewarded almost immediately by Bero who

“cuts him across the face with a swagger stick. Aafaa staggers back, clutching the wound.” (233)

Bero tells them without mincing any words that they should beware of what he is capable of doing. He then commands them to carry out his instructions as per his orders. Having done that he walks towards his home where Si Bero gives him a warm welcome but he is rather indifferent to the rituals she is carrying out. Once inside the hut, Si Bero

asks about the whereabouts of their father. Bero beats around the bush and then adds that he will join them in his own time.

Si Bero then asks her brother to thank the old hags, the women who have safeguarded his return home. Bero does not move an inch; he simply stares in the direction of the hut of the old women.

Thereafter, in Bero's hut a Priest enters to enquire about the well being of Bero and more importantly, to ask for medicines to remove the ailments that he has been suffering from. Bero is indifferent towards him also. The Priest is not aware of this and continues his never-ending talks. When referring to the Old Man, Bero's father, the Priest calls him a strange man because he intended to legalize cannibalism. Bero finds nothing strange in that and further goes on to state that human flesh is in fact delicious. The Priest is dumb-founded and flees almost immediately when Bero asks him to remain for dinner to taste human flesh. Si Bero, on the other hand, is appalled on hearing this from her brother. What petrifies her even more is the fact that her brother no longer believes in the existence of Yoruba gods. Bero had brought up an entirely new concept of god by calling his new god "As." Si Bero is flabbergasted when she learns from her brother that he has imprisoned his own father in the hut because he was teaching people how to think. This is how the first

part of the play ends.

In the first part of the play we learn about the blood relations of the Bero family. The Bero's are a family that practice making herbal medicine. During war, both father and son go to take part in it. The role of the Old Man in the war was to work in the rehabilitation camp for the disabled. Dr. Bero as we have already learnt, had changed his profession from fighting to intelligence due to the sudden death of the intelligence head. In the absence of the male members of the family, Si Bero tries learning about herbal medicines with the help of two earth mothers that is Iya Agba and Iya Mate. The earth mothers and the Priest constitute a group who are not physically or mentally affected by the war. Therefore, the three –member family in-fact represents the paradigmatic picture of the larger society. Dr. Bero is a power hungry fanatic man. Si Bero on the other hand is an innocent woman outside the power game. The Old Man works in the rehabilitation camp helping the disabled. We learn from Dr. Bero that the Old Man blasphemies the concept of his job by daring to make the injured able to think instead of making them learn how to amuse themselves. Dr. Bero states vehemently;

“It's not his charitable propensities I am concerned with. Father's assignment was to help the wounded

readjust to the pieces and remnants of their bodies.

Physically. Teach them to make baskets if they still had fingers. To use their mouths to ply needles if they had none, or to use it to sing if their vocal chords had not been shot away. Teach them to amuse themselves, make something of themselves. Instead he began to teach them to think, think, THINK! Can you picture a more treacherous deed than to place a working mind in a mangled body?" (242)

The idea of the government was not to make the people think. It was against the policy of the government. The idea that was to be instilled in the people was to act as puppets in the hands of the government officials. The Old Man on the other hand defies the idea of having puppets and this is the reason why his son imprisons his own father. The Mendicants represent the society itself and more specially the victims of war. According to Soyinka, Cripple represents the mental cripple, the really dissociated personality in contemporary terms. The Mendicants, like the society have no assurance of social justice. They have been mentally deformed by the war.

In the next part of the play that is Part Two, the Mendicants are

discussing amongst themselves various things, various dreams in the presence of the Old Man. Cripple describes his recurring dream that is as follows;

“I ---dream he tells me to get on the table. He says, I could not attend to you before but there were other things---one thing at a time, certain things are more important than others. So he operates on my back and in another moment he’s finished, wipes his hands and says—

Aafaa: Arise, throw off thy crutches and follow me.” (249)

The “he” referred to here is none other than Dr. Bero. The Old man listens to this dream of Cripple very attentively. A little later, Dr. Bero enters with food for his father. The Old Man wishes to write a letter to Dr. Bero’s seniors but he is denied the right to do so. When father and son start talking there is more of a version of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. Dr. Bero is insensitive towards the feelings of humanity and as such has become a scheming rogue and evil personified. Whereas, the Old Man is an embodiment of humanity and sticks to his guns calling a spade a spade. Old Man sees himself as a shadow of the last straw of humanity left in Dr. Bero which he could kill or he could leave to die. He says;

“----I am the last proof of the human in

you. The last shadow. Shadows are tough things to be rid of.

[*He chuckles.*] How does one prove he was never

born of a man? Of course you could kill me---“ (253)

Dr. Bero reminds him that he is the one who saved his father's life because to show the power hungry officers their madness, he tricked them into eating human flesh and as a result, the officers intended to kill him. However, the biggest drawback was that Old Man's plan backfired and it became a sign of power to eat human flesh. The Old Man is not the least bit grateful that Dr. Bero saved his life because he knows that he has his selfish interests to serve. Towards the end of this meeting between father and son, the father has irked his son so much that his son moves out of the hut giving him his last meal. The sign is clear Old Man's life will be ended shortly afterwards.

A little later Si Bero asks for permission to see her father but her brother denies it saying that their father has lost his senses and has also become violent. Si Bero then tells her brother that the earth mothers wish to be paid for their services in terms other than money. To this Bero states rather coldly;

“They are asking for death.” (256)

He walks towards their hut thereafter with Si Bero saying to him

that he should not kill them. Once he enters the hut he learns that the two women have had Si Bero come in their fold. Dr. Bero is inquisitive about this new business and asks the women about their newfound tricks. They do not give in to his threats and he walks away ranting and raving.

Back in the basement of the hut where the Mendicants are with the Old Man, he tries to make the Mendicants start thinking again. The Old Man has composed a few satirical verses that the Mendicants are singing. One of them is composed is on the tune of "Oh when the saints go marching in." The song is as follows;

"Before I join

The saints above

Before I join

The saints above

I want to sit on that damned quorum." (261)

Clearly, Old Man mocks the government and its thirst for power. The vehemence of the Old Man's language can be compared to a surgeon's knife. He is a kind of lunatic who uses violent means to heal people. In order to heal Cripple, he starts performing a surgery on him to enable Cripple to walk properly. However, Dr. Bero enters and shoots the Old Man under the impression that he is killing Cripple. This is how the

drama ends- on a note of tragedy.

"Madmen and Specialists" is the ultimate in estoric and ritual chaos. There is a figurative exorcism of the demons of war in which the estoric style, pushed to its limits finds its own simultaneous apotheosis and exorcism.

6.2: Clash Of Cultures in “Madmen and Specialists.”

As mentioned earlier, this drama is set on one of the bleakest pasts of Nigeria, that is the Nigerian civil war and the cultural clash is evident in it. Before discussing the cultural clash it is important to first understand the exact political, social and religious status that Nigeria was under during that period of time.

The Nigerian civil war, popularly known all over the world as the "Biafran War" was fought from 2 July 1967 to 15 January 1970. The war was between the then Eastern Region of Nigeria and the rest of the country. The Eastern Region declared itself an independent state which was regarded as an act of secession by the Federal Military Government of Nigeria. The war was fought to reunify the country. The Nigerian Civil War broke out on 6 July 1967. The war was the culmination of an uneasy peace and stability that had plagued the Nation from independence in 1960. This situation had its genesis in the geography, history, culture and demography of Nigeria.

The immediate cause of the civil war itself may be identified as the coup and the counter coup of 1966 which altered the political equation and destroyed the fragile trust existing among the major ethnic groups.

As a means of holding the country together in the last result, the country was divided into twelve states from the original four regions in May 1967. The former Eastern Region under Lt. Col. Ojukwu saw the act of the creation of states by decree "without consultation" as the last straw, and declared the Region an independent state of "Biafra". The Federal Government in Lagos saw this as an act of secession and illegal. Several meetings were held to resolve the issue peacefully without success. To avoid disintegration of the country, the central government was left with only one choice of bringing back the Region to the main fold by force.

The Federal side expected a quick victory while the Biafrans saw the war as that of survival and were ready to fight to the last man. By August 1967, the war had been extended to the Mid - Western Region by the Biafrans with the aim to relief pressure on the northern front and to threaten the Federal Capital, Lagos. Both sides employed Political, Diplomatic, Psychological and Military strategies to prosecute the war.

By the end of April 1969, after almost two years of bloody and destructive war, the envisioned quick victory had eluded the Federal side, the rebel enclave had been drastically reduced in size but the Biafrans were still holding on. More peace conferences were held but none achieved a cease - fire and an end to the war. The Federals embarked on

a strategic envelopment of the remaining Biafran enclave. By the Christmas of 1969, it was obvious that the end of the civil war was near.

The self - acclaimed Head of State of Biafra, Lt. Col. Ojukwu, realizing the hopelessness of the situation fled the enclave with his immediate family members on the 10th of January 1970. The Commander of the Biafran Army who took over the administration of the remaining enclave surrendered to the Federal Government on 14th January 1970 bringing an end to the war, secessionist attempt and bloodshed.

"Madmen and Specialists" is therefore Soyinka's most bitter and anguished play as he deals with the madness of war and prison genesis. The cultural clash in this play exists in a symbiosis with ego and spiritual superconscious. Dr. Bero is actually an insecure character who appears not to have fully confronted the horrors brought home to him by his more knowledgeable father although he poses as a Grand Guignol caricature of evil. The Old Man is not fooled by Bero and tells him exactly what he is in the lines below. He says;

“---you cyst, you cyst, you splint in the arrow of arrogance,
the dog in the dogma, tick of a heretic, the tick in politics, the
mock in democracy, the mar of marxism, a tic of the fanatic,

the boo in buddhism, the ham in Mohammed, the dash in the criss-cross of Christ, the dot on the I of ego an ass in the mass, the ash in ashram, a boot in kibbutz, the pee of priesthood, the peepee of perfect priesthood, oh how dare you raise your hindquarters you dog of dogma and cast the scent of your existence on the lamp-pole of Destiny you HOLE IN THE ZERO OF NOTHING!" (275)

Clearly, the Old Man has shown Bero the mirror of reality. Bero is nothing but an insecure person who is in the disguise of a uniform of evil.

The drama begins with the traditional male antipathy towards the figures Iya Agba and Iya Mate who retain their distinction through the appellation "*iya*" or mother. Bero openly reacts to the earth mothers with disgust and loathing. He does so in order to hide his inner feelings of fear and intimidation. To Iya Agba's sarcastic question;

"Did I scare you?" (258)

Bero reacts startled saying;

"What is a thing like you still doing alive?" (258)

His disrespect shows violation against Yoruba customs as it is, he tries to usurp the supremacy of Yoruba gods through violence and torture. His self-proclaimed omnipotence sustains itself through the

manipulation of divine law when he states;

“Power comes from bending Nature to your will. The Specialist they call me, and a specialist is –well--a specialist.

You analyse, you diagnose, you---[*He aims an imaginary gun.*] prescribe.” (237)

The scientific knowledge of the Specialist has infact acted as a bane. As it is, he has distorted the scientific knowledge in the hands of unscrupulous dictators and has thereby colonized the rules of nature in the name of newly found scientific faith that debases Yoruba spirituality by eliminating the ancestral mothers in favour of the self-anointed godhead. The new knowledge of expertise is a corruption of the sacred knowledge of the mothers who are thereby called upon to to restore the Yoruba world to its natural balance.

According to Yoruba culture women have a very important role in the society. However, the new lust for power, the scientific ways and the scientific world negates the position of women in society. Bero illustrates this negation when he denigrates the ancient religion of the mothers by associating it with a petty cult that cannot be taken seriously. The following lines state the above;

“Iya Agba: ---To teach what we know, a pupil must come into

the fold.

Bero: What fold? Some filthy thieving cult?

Iya Agba: It's no light step for man or woman.

Bero: And what—cult is this?

Iya Agba: Not any cult you can destroy. We move as the Earth moves. We age as Earth ages." (259)

Bero's inability to recognize the sanctity of the mothers is a clear disavowal of the spiritual basis of his society which are demonstrated by his acts of violence and the negation of the creative and moral force of Yoruba women.

In this play, Bero's moral blindness demonstrates his own disconnection from the Yoruba aesthetic of maternal divinity and his submission to the irrelevant cult of "As." As is in-fact the vicious cycle of interminable violence and oppression dominated by a malevolent male deity. This prevailing God is, appropriately, a theatrogonic deity

"who wears a hundred masks and a thousand outward forms."

(271)

The play reveals a crisis of morality in which spiritual truth is a product of divine illumination as represented by the earth mothers and their age-old transcendental religion---the Yoruba religion. The distortion

of this religion leads to mental disruption based on lies and the deception of the corrupted minds in its journey towards eternal damnation. Bero becomes the new faith's proponent when he states:

"I do not need illusions. I control lives." (264)

In this manner, by manipulating the powers of creation through the subjugation of human life Bero's totalitarianism becomes the new European religion in which a neo-colonial autocracy subverts democratic rule through the intimidation of all citizens.

The earth mothers deeply acknowledge their Yoruba culture because their culture has the powers of fusing physical healing with spiritual renewal. Bero on the other hand, being a medical man abandons not only the power of healing but rejects the earth alongwith its spiritual lessons too. To Soyinka this alienation from the earth is a symptom of sickness. This is because the Yoruba are mostly an agrarian people and their dependance on land keeps them open to the message of regeneration and renewal that Nature holds out. The earth, according to the Yoruba, is the domain of goddess Onile. The pre-eminence of this goddess in Yoruba myths is clear from the acknowledgement of her existence before the other gods. In her rites, she is referred to as Iya or Mother and she is believed to be polluted by the shedding of human blood except in

sacrifice and demands costly rites of purification and atonement. Bero has therefore polluted the earth as he states when his sister welcomes him home. He says;

[Si Bero reappears with a gourd of palm wine, pours it on the ground in front of the doorstep. Then she moves to unlace his boots]

Bero: You still keep up these little habits.

Si Bero: I like to keep close to earth.

Bero: *[stepping back to prevent her from taking off his boots]*

Bare feet, wet earth. We've wetted your good earth with something more potent than that, you know." (234)

Clearly, the more potent thing here is none other than human blood and according to the Yoruba this kind of violation of the earth is dealt by with the Ogbonni.

The earth mothers affirm their power through a prismatic earth-related consciousness exemplified by their use of curative herbs for healing. The earth mothers represent the forces of good. As Iya Agba states;

"It's my life that's gone into this. I haven't burrowed so deep to cast good earth on worthless seeds" (235)

Here what she is trying to say is that the cultivation of good seed ensures healthy crops just as the adherence to spiritual values maintains a community's integrity. The knowledge of these ladies is based on the Yoruba belief that all forces of nature are united by the primeval Mother spirit. They stress on the importance of harmony over domination whereas Bero, as a dark contrast and suited to new belief believes in gaining power to dominate nature.

The earth mother's Yoruba spirituality inculdes a sense of social responsibility. They are in-fact true symbols of Yoruba patriotic service during times of war when the society was going through moral and spiritual distortions. Towards the end of the play, Iya Agba kindles fire to create a new beginning. It is actually the intervention of a cosmic force for redressing the balance between the forces of good and evil which co-exist in the universe. It could be said that she is trying to purify through Yoruba methodology what Bero and men of his likes have done. They have eroded the roots of a culture that according to them, existed way beyond all European culture. For people like Iya Agba and Iya Mate this new culture has proved devastating for the people of the land. It has led people into frenzy for power and position. Therefore, the fire lit by Iya Agba is not a destructive force but an element of cosmic Yoruba healing

to liberate the human mind and free the body from the maladies of the contemporary age and thereby make way for a new level of consciousness. The fire is meant to restore the earth's spiritual vitality in light of the present moral decay. The earth mothers expose the present day scientificism and the machinations of political absolutism. Through the earth mothers, Soyinka reaffirms his spiritual faith in Yoruba traditions and cosmology. At the same time he questions, through the earth mothers the validity of the thirst for power at the cost of innocent lives.

The Old Man also has a very important role to play as far as his culture is concerned. At the cannibal feast where the Old Man had served an Ateran feast of human flesh to his son and fellow officers was infact to make them aware of the ultimate expression of power over one's fellow humans which was the true enormity of war. The basic pattern of the cannibal feast is reapeated in the drama's climatic parody in which the earlier motifs of surgigal torture and the carving up of human meat come together. Old Man's figurative dissection of Cripple was to demonstrate the futility of the latter's dream of a miracle cure operation and the powerlessness of surgery over diseased souls.

Old Man doning his son's surgical garb is vividly a mock excision of the human questioning capacity wherein Cripple plays the part of the

father and the father plays that of the son. That is to say, the madman takes on the disguise of a specialist to prove to the specialist that he is a madman.

There is even a far greater depth to this scene which is concerned with the surgery and that is that the father is actually trying to ritually exorcise from his own being the spirit of the son whom he has created and whom he is responsible for. A spirit who must be summoned in order to be driven out and who must be imitated to be conjured up. The ritual model here is the eugungun celebrant on his passage from the satiric to the cultic phase of the rite and from the parodic imitation to the point of actual possession in which he actually becomes what he has represented. In this figurative eugungun rite, the father is possessed by his spiritually dead son. A son who has spat on the face of his ancestors by defying humanity and accepting colonial power introduced by the newfound government.

Bero blindly believes in the totality of his new faith. He swears in the name of "As" and not in the name of any Yoruba deity. When describing As, the Old Man scoffs at it. He states;

"----As

Is, and the system is its mainstay though it wear a hundred

masks and a thousand outward forms.” (271)

He further goes on to elaborate that As is a corrupt deity whose gossellers are also corrupt. He presents in bare nakedness the new religion which debases the Yoruba culture and which on its own is nothing but a power craving madness. This new deity stands upon pillars of falsehood and scientificism. On tracing the history of the latest gospel of As Aafaa states;

“In the beginning was the Priesthood, and the Priesthood was one. Then came schism after schism by a parcel of schismatic ticks in the One Body of Priesthood, the political priesthood went right, the spiritual priesthood went left or vice versa the political priesthood went back the spiritual went fore and vice versa the political priesthood went down and the spiritual priesthood went up and vice versa the loyalty of homo sapiens was never divided for two parts of a division make a whole and there is no hole in the monolithic two halves of the priesthood.” (272)

What Aafaa says above is worth noting. It shows the transition of a nation and how eventually a nation stands divided. Initially, in Nigeria there was no foreign culture but there were various ethnic traditions and

beliefs, as we are well aware of already. However, as things went by Christianity was introduced and that is what Aafaa refers to as the Priesthood. Christianity began setting its foot in Nigeria and Yoruba beliefs started diminishing. Later on what followed with the introduction of a new culture was the introduction of European regime, scientificism and the madness of power. Therefore, it is vivid that it is the new culture which is held deeply responsible for the present sorry state of affairs in the land.

In another speech by Blindman, where Blindman is imitating a military dictator, Soyinka ridicules the rulers of Nigeria who tried to legitimize their violence by framing it in religious rhetoric. He says;

“---It was our duty and a historical necessity--- a historical beauty—What though the wind of change is blowing over this entire continent, our principles and traditions---yes, must be maintained. For we are threatened.” (285-287)

It is ironic that the speaker is trying to aim at maintaining tradition because the speaker is actually using the new tradition as a tool to wipe out his own. The rulers in the play term their war a “historical beauty” and capitalize on issues like ethnic and cultural purity that would provoke blind and fierce passions.

In this drama which showcases the dark side of Nigeria during its most dire circumstances, Soyinka has, in a brilliant manner, chalked out the cultural clash. He has portrayed in a crystal clear manner how development leads to the lust for power, how power leads to the corrosion of values and ideals and moreover, how progression leads to the retardation of the soul.

Though the play is bitter and violently attacks a sick society, Soyinka ends the play with a prospect of improvement. The fire lit by Iya Agba signifies this to a great extent.

According to Abiola Irele;

“The play itself is a kind of fantasy that takes off from reality and whose action seems to run parallel to it by developing the implications of real life situations to their weird, absurd and finally inhuman limits. The prevailing atmosphere of the play is one of acute moral and spiritual discomfort.”²

I most certainly do agree with this view and would like to add further that the spiritual discomfort portrayed in the drama gives an eerie feel. Afterall, what is the point in gaining scientific knowledge, at the cost of debasing one's own traditional knowledge? What is the use of

accepting a tradition, a regime that gains its power at the cost of innocent lives?

Notes and references

¹ A disease of the nervous system characterized by involuntary contraction of muscle groups, accompanied by weakness, and often by slight mental derangement, due to spinal lesions interfering with motor function of brain or cord.

² James Gibbs: "Macmillan Modern Dramatists- Wole Soyinka," 1986,

CONCLUSION AND
STYLISTICS
OF SOYINKA

Chapter 7: CONCLUSION

In African writing, Wole Soyinka is an institution in himself. He has a knack of penning down his thoughts skillfully through the written word. Undoubtedly, it is the written word that conveys the exact emotions and sentiments to us. They reflect the mirror image of circumstances, situations, traditions and conflicts thereby enlightening us about a particular phase or time of a country and its people. Soyinka has, in his dramas, reflected in one way or the other the conflict faced by his people, the trauma of a country grappling with civil war and the irony of progress.

All the five plays have a background different from the other and have also been a step ahead of the other in presenting the cultural clash. In the "Lion and the Jewel," Sidi is presented as the village girl who is wooed by Baroka and Lakunle. In this drama Baroka symbolises the ethnic Yoruba culture whereas Lakunle represents the European one. This play has a serene village setting. In contrast, in "Kongi's Harvest," we come across Kongi, a man who wishes to implement new ways and means by sidelining his own tradition. This drama deals with dictatorship. The Jero plays namely, "The Trials of Brother Jero" and

“Jero’s Metamorphosis” present Jero who is a man who has used Christianity as a means of serving his selfish means. This play reveals the shallowness of fake prophets in Nigeria. In the last play that is, “Madmen and Specialists,” the tragedy of war and scientificism is showcased. In this drama the cultural clash is presented between two groups. One group believes in advancement and new techniques whereas the other believes in sticking to their own beliefs, systems and ways of life. The drama is based on the civil war of Nigeria and its aftermath. In this manner, all his dramas are different from each other that is to say, there is variety in the plays but the central theme of cultural clash is the same.

Soyinka, in all these dramas presents the radical originality of his approach to liberating Nigeria, a Black Country from its crippling legacy of European imperialism. He envisioned a "New Nigeria" that would escape its colonial past by grafting the technical advances of the present onto the stock of its own ancient traditions. In his view, native myth, reformulated to accommodate contemporary reality, was to be the foundation of the future, opening the way to self-retrieval, cultural recollection and cultural security.

Style Of Wole Soyinka

In these dramas, Soyinka fuses Western elements with subject matter and dramatic techniques deeply rooted in Yoruba folklore and religion. He uses symbolism, flashback and ingenious plotting to create a rich dramatic structure. Soyinka's works exhibit humour and fine poetic style as well as his gift for irony and satire and for accurately matching the language of complex characters to their social position and moral qualities. He has staged rites in his dramas too and of them he says;

“Well, rites, rituals, ceremonials, festivals are a rich source of material for drama. They are intrinsically dramatic in themselves, because they are formalized. Apart from being visually clarifying, their representation is so precise that even when the meaning is obscure you are left with a form so clear that it reifies itself into a very concrete meaning for the viewer. So, for me, rites, rituals are inevitable metaphors for the drama of life, for many, many human situations.”¹

He presents in a brilliant manner Yoruba mythology on stage by

interpreting the gods of Yoruba religion. He also makes abundant use of Yoruba cultural heritage like the eugungun, the ritual dances and various customs.

Although his dramas are in English, he makes a lot of use of Yoruba songs and dances and passages in Nigerian pidgin. He does not write in English to win fans in countries abroad but because of the necessity of communicating within other Nigerian ethnic groups and in order to connect to the whole world through the English language.

Apart from this, it is interesting to note that Soyinka has in fact been influenced by theaters of the West and other African countries. Soyinka does agree with this and also says in the same vein that he feels that eclecticism is a right. He further adds that it is what an artist does with the borrowed material that is important and not the amount of how much he takes or borrows.

For example, Soyinka's drama, "The Trials of Brother Jero" has been inspired by Moliere's "Tartuffe". In addition, Soyinka's character; Jero in this drama has been a mirror image of Serjeant Musgrave in John Ardean's "Serjeant Musgrave's Dance." The tyranny and totalitarianism of the government in the same drama is a part of "Kongi's Harvest." The theme of impotence in "The Lion and the Jewel" is similar to the theme

in Ben Johnson's "Volpone" and Wycherley's "The Country Wife." What is commendable about Soyinka's dramas is that although other dramas and other playwrights have influenced him, he has presented his own dramas in a Yoruba text without over hammering what he wishes to convey.

Regarding the cultural clash in his dramas, Soyinka says;

"I don't know that I ever have been consciously anxious to do that (clash of cultures)---except perhaps in "Death and the King's Horseman," which is, they will tell you, of an actual piece of history in which European colonial officer's ethos came into conflict with the practices of the society of which you are a part. Apart from that I have never really been interested in the clash between two cultures---." ² (98)

Here what I wish to state is that although he, himself has never been interested in the cultural conflict, his dramas portray it loud and clear. It is a simple logic of seeing a half-filled glass of water. Many would regard it as being half empty while the psychology of other's would regard it half-full. I personally do feel that the cultural clash exists in all the dramas I have undertaken for research. How else could one

define Sidi's love for Baroka, her love for her custom? In "Kongi's Harvest," what would one call the idea of usurping the rule of the Oba's and heading for dictatorship? Similarly, the idea of getting followers by false promises through the medium of Christianity while debunking Yoruba tradition again exemplifies cultural clash in the Jero plays. Eventually, the thirst for power and the irony of progress, the shunning of Yoruba customs are a cause for concern in "Madmen and Specialists."

While referring to the appraisal of Soyinka's work, we need to consider two factors that are, I believe, of primary importance for an evaluation of its significance. The first factor has to do with language, which is the determining medium of literary art, so that the very fact that the writer works in and through words provides the immediate basis of judgements of his work. It is his gift of language, the assured manner of his deployment of its resources to establish a distinctive tone of address, that first strikes us about Soyinka as being worthy of attention and marks him out for serious consideration.

It must be said at once that the command of language, viewed in its proper bearing upon the evaluation of any writer's work, implies more than is customarily thought of as style. It extends beyond the topical effect of a skilful arrangement of words to the larger sense of form that is

the controlling principle of significance in the literary work. It is essential that we feel the words as the writer deploys them, that they function in a unified context of meanings that either reach out towards an explicit reference or carry the charge of deep intimations. It is not therefore, a question of the ostensible craft which the writer displays, not the textual strategies which lie at the technical surface of his gesture towards meaning, but one of the fundamental quality of expression indicative of a profound engagement with experience.

The second factor I have in mind emerges at once from those observations. The writer's mode of involvement with language and his appropriation of form in the comprehensive sense suggested by his bringing both to bear on experience, reflect the degree of intensity of his responses to the world, of his awareness of certain truths about it by which his intelligence and the whole of his inner life are solicited, so that his voice is challenged into as potent an utterance as his command of language will allow. There is thus an essential imbrication of theme and language, vision and expression – a connection between the writer's advance upon language and the impulse that moves him to testify about the world. By way of consequence, the relation between his demands upon language and the quality of his testimony is an equally determining

one, for the exploration of language, going with the concern for significant form, presents itself not only as a striving for a proper adequation of expressive means to the prompting of the imagination but also as a mode of entry into the living context of experience by which that imagination is conditioned. Language and form are thus bound up with the imaginative temper and the particularized vision manifested in a writer's work, such that the range and power of his evocations as embodied in his text provide pointers to his heightened consciousness of life in its variousness and of experience in its fullest human implications. Soyinka's writing is the active working out of a moral project through an attentive preoccupation with the vicissitudes of the communal existence.

I have thought it necessary at the outset of this homage to Soyinka, to insist, by way of restatement, upon these elementary considerations, in order to set out a measure for the appraisal of his work, one that seems to me appropriate to its context of elaboration and its specific orientation. However limited it may appear, a restatement of this kind is particularly called for at this time and on an occasion like this, as we commemorate decades of Soyinka's singular career and achievement, in order to fully appreciate the nature and scope of that achievement.

There is a special reason, perhaps even an urgent one, why the

necessary relation of the literary imagination to life requires restating at this time in the African context. For as anyone who has been following the course of contemporary literature in the major European languages is well aware, the dominant spirit in what is regarded as its representative direction has been marked by a deliberate disengagement of this literature from experience, a refusal to acknowledge its referential import in any obvious relation to human significance. This phenomenon is accompanied by a preoccupation with the complexities of expression as such, without a correspondence to the human subject, to such an extent that the procedures of this literature have come to imply a denial of the possibility of communication through language at any but the most elementary level. We are thus presented with the unsettling paradox of language itself being employed to negate the indices of our humanity. This is not of course all there is to be said about contemporary Western literature, and I am aware that in its abruptness, the observation I have just made and the judgement it entails need to be qualified – there are important ways in which the procedures of oblique and opaque expression in literature reflect a sharp awareness of the ambiguous character of language itself as a medium of communication. However, I am concerned here with the general import of the development I've been

examining, which strikes one as a turning in of language and with it, literary form, upon itself, in a gesture of recoil from the world. And it is significant to note that this development has been in no small way responsible for fostering a conception of language as a closed system of signs without any necessary correspondence to a process of designation by which the universe we inhabit and which impinges upon our ordinary consciousness is realized or made sense of. It is useful and especially instructive of the particular significance of Soyinka's work to place it against this external background. The conventions prevailing in a certain kind of contemporary literature in the Western world and the philosophical and critical positions they appear to endorse enter into our purview, if only because, by reason of language and the inheritance of form that goes with it, Soyinka's work bears a relation to the general movement of literature outside our continent. But the point of taking into account that relation is to establish a contrasting measure of its appraisal and to insist on its specific affirmative character, its refusal to espouse the fundamental nihilism inherent in the cutting off of literature from concrete experience. The external reference challenges us further to an emphasis upon a fundamental aspect of Soyinka's work: the wholehearted engagement with experience in its human dimensions

assumes in his work a communal significance that makes manifest its essential grounding in a comprehensive ethos. For Soyinka, then, writing is not simply a withdrawal into a private world of sensations and self-contemplation, a world not brought into immediate relation with the rest of the life in which the consciousness is located. Still less is it a dispassionate contemplation of human existence, but the active working out of a moral project through an attentive preoccupation with the vicissitudes of the communal existence.

These observations lead us to a conundrum that is at the heart of Soyinka's work: the fact that a considerable part of Soyinka's achievement resides in his effort to resolve the problems posed to his creative endeavour by the primary divergence between language and cultural reference. These are problems with which every African writer who employs a European language is confronted, for the language question has for our writers a significance that goes beyond the requirements of formal expression. With Soyinka, the wrestling with language as medium of expression presents itself as the very condition for his affirmative purpose: to endow anew with coherence the fragmented consciousness as Africans caught in the unsettling movement of the historical process. Indeed, the cultural obligation to employ an

alien tongue for his expression forms part of the historical predicament upon which his work is centered, is in itself a symptom of the fragmentation of the African world with which he is concerned: of the thought processes, distinct sensibility and of the modes of discourse that correspond to the particular order of life within that universe. It is indeed pertinent to observe here, that one of the strategic areas of our confrontation with Western imperialism has been that of the universe of discourse. Frantz Fanon³ has drawn attention to the way in which the battle of words engaged in with the colonizer in his own language has had a crucial importance for the outcome of our struggle for an autonomous place in history and an acceptable mode of existence in the world.

Soyinka's work does not of course belong as such to the literature of combat, both imaginative and ideological, that went with our nationalist assertion, but it draws particular significance of its own from the same conditions which called it forth, and of which the linguistic situation is an important marker. This situation, as we know, is that of diglossia, considered broadly as a juxtaposition of two series of languages – on one hand, the vernaculars forming a single linguistic

cluster, so to speak, and on the other, the imported language, standing in direct opposition to them. The opposition marks a state of disjunction, not only for the class of individuals who have been directly incorporated into the colonial system, but within the society as a whole. To use a term proposed by the Russian critic and philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin⁴, the colonial situation is a logosphere in which the divide between two contending visions of the world is marked by the tension between the vernacular and the imported official language.

It is obvious that in such a situation, the second, imported language cannot fully exist for the colonized writer as a natural and spontaneous medium through which to convey his responses to the world. It first becomes available to him therefore only as a possibility, offering a provisional means for a process of mediation between two realms of experience, two orders of life, for the transposition of the images and metaphors contained within the structures of his vernacular language into the semantic and symbolic field proposed by the second language. For Soyinka, this process of mediation that takes place at the level of language, and by extension, of form, has involved a double artistic and ideological burden. It has meant for him not only a question of making

the English language fully expressive of his disposition to the world as a focus of sentience and awareness, but also of achieving a field of discourse that, as a writer, he creates out of the resources of the second language, the sense of a new integration within a third realm of consciousness and being. In other words, the engagement with language has for Soyinka an existential significance. We come readily to an understanding of this significance of the language question to Soyinka's work when we consider the specific environment of its development. To do this, we need to take account of the fact that the Yoruba language which stands as the linguistic hinterland to his investment of the terrain of English exerts a constant pressure on his expression. I hardly need point out that this is not simply a matter of the occasional transliteration of figures of speech or turns of phrase, but rather of a pervasive colouring of his idiom. The Yoruba hinterland of expressive modes exerts a direct pressure on Soyinka's work. Here, it is important to note the vivid sense of language, the reverence for words that characterizes practically all traditional African cultures. However, we can distinguish between those that cultivate a Spartan, laconic use of words, at one extreme, and at the other, those that accept them as a gift of the gods, to be reveled in and expended with delight. Yoruba culture belongs very much to this latter

category, and the attitude to language that prevails within it makes its impact forcefully felt in Soyinka's expression. We must go further in examining this impact, for the linguistic conditioning of Soyinka's immediate environment finds its most achieved expression in the oral literature which enters directly into those ceremonial forms of cultural expression where it has the central function of intensifying experience. Words achieve at this level a new symbolic intensity in their mode of reference. In ritual, especially, they acquire a hieratic dimension. To refer to this is to indicate at once a primary source of Soyinka's inspiration and expression. I shall consider in a moment the significance of this for his work.

We recognize in the compulsive exploration of language that Soyinka displays in his work the way in which the influence of his linguistic and cultural background works itself into his handling of English, which can be described as his second language in a sense that is only and strictly technical. The nature of the Yoruba language and the peculiar hold it exerts upon its native speakers condition a fascination in an almost literal sense with words, with a delight in their sheer combination in speech and with their potency as the elements of enunciation, a fascination that Soyinka has transferred to his use of

English. This grounding spirit of the Yoruba language places Soyinka in an immediate relationship to both Daniel O. Fagunwa and Amos Tutuola, but it is clear that in his case, there is a more intimate association between the aesthetic elaboration of language as a medium, and the visionary purpose of expression. We must also take into account as a significant part of the total environment in which his work has developed, the evolution of the Yoruba language and culture in contemporary times, and his immersion in a field of expression marked by a dynamic interrelationship of forms. We may illustrate the phenomenon by remarking that Soyinka's drama has links not only with the indigenous forms but also with the evolving tradition of the Yoruba travelling theatre represented by the work of the veteran Hubert Ogunde, taken up and extended by Kola Ogunmola and Duro Ladipo. His drama takes in elements from these areas, and as Dan Izevbaye has observed, derives inspiration as well from the popular culture of the day in his own background. And in his newly published magisterial study, Biodun Jeyifo has drawn attention to his appropriation of these popular forms to supplement his message. We can observe that in Soyinka's work this complex background of his indigenous inheritance merges into his Western legacy denoted by his relationship to the English language.

Soyinka bridges the distance between his two worlds in a way that can only be considered unique, and we sense this precisely in his manipulation of English: in the special effects he wrings upon the language of Shakespeare and the inflections he brings to its very movement. We might specify this linguistic prowess by remarking that his work enacts a lively interaction between the exuberance of Yoruba and the robustness of English. Anyone who is familiar with the two languages, with their distinctive tonalities and registers, can feel the way in which Soyinka's idiom commands an intimate collaboration between them for powerful effect. The supreme instance of this achievement remains for us "Kongi's Harvest," where it is seen to proceed from conscious representation of the forms of life associated with the thematic reference of the play. It is important to observe however, that the language of the play is the result of a continuous refinement of a basic quality of Soyinka's expression, carried here, unmistakably, to a point of triumph.

It is necessary to invoke Bakhtin once again, in order to place the remarks I have been making on Soyinka's relationship to language in what seems to me their proper theoretical perspective. As we consider the diversity of his sources, we are struck by the way in which his work

integrates them into a sustained polyphony of expression. It is significant in this respect to note that the context of elaboration of his work is associated with a marked situation of heteroglossia, in Bakhtin's sense of a tension-filled space of contending discourses and the points of view, world visions and valuations that they signify. If then we refer to Soyinka's integration of a controlling impulse in his use of language, it becomes possible to identify a feature of his work that seems to me to constitute the sustaining condition of his achievement, the awareness from which his entire expression proceeds, that his double relation to two languages and to the two worlds they designate, far from being a limiting factor of his creativity, affords him rather greater scope of expression in an expanded universe of imaginative discourse.

There is, it seems to me, a direct connection between this character of Soyinka's work revealed by his engagement with language and the sense of completeness that his work evinces. The variety of thematic approach, the range of reference and vitality of the creative impulse in this work – these are the qualities that we have come to recognize as distinguishing elements of Soyinka's achievement. They derive significance from the personal urgency of his preoccupation with the realities of his time and place, and the imperatives of his moral and

ideological project he has undertaken in relation to his situation. There is manifest in Soyinka's work a vivid awareness of the historical process which has produced among us the dislocations, the consequences of which we continue to live with. It is not, I think, a simplifying view of his work to observe that it arises from a profound sense of mission, of the human responsibility of the artist.

I cannot here undertake the kind of comprehensive review of Soyinka's writing that would bring out the point of my statement. I intend therefore to focus here on one aspect of his thematic preoccupation which, it seems to me, is the obvious determining principle of his work – the effort to overcome the disabling stresses of the historical condition and transcend them in a new vision of life. In considering this theme, it is first necessary to dispel a misconception about Soyinka's work – the notion that his is not concerned, or hardly so, with the colonial problem, that he is indifferent in fact to the question of racial retrieval and the revaluation of African culture. This notion has been promoted by the hostility he displayed in his early years towards the concept of Negritude which he famously described as "this magnitude of unfelt abstractions". In his examination of Negritude literature, Soyinka was obliged to acknowledge the effort to name a felt condition: the

response to the denial of humanity to blacks and denigration of our culture, and the effort to repair the psychic damage occasioned by the colonial experience. But what I have called his reconciliation with Negritude seems to me logical, inherent in all his work from the very beginning, as the general remarks I have proposed already indicate. But it is important to stress that the theme of racial protest is already apparent in his early play, "The Invention," which has just been unearthed by the South African scholar, Zodwa Motsa⁵. It is of considerable interest here to observe the developing sense of disaffection toward the western paradigm as embodied in the scientific culture. For it is a profound distrust of science as an organizing system that underlies Soyinka's bitter satire of racism in this play. There is already apparent here a view of western rationalism as not merely inadequate but in a fundamental sense, dismal. But the project of communal retrieval develops in Soyinka's work on a much broader front than this celebration of blackness suggests. It has to do rather with a reappraisal of the global African situation in the aftermath of slavery and colonization, of our existential condition as we confront the pressures of an imposed modernity. Given this historical and metaphysical perspective, the project of reconstruction could not but

declare itself at first in a negative way, in the critical stance of the writer's outlook on the confusions that have attended the political and social developments in Africa, and the cultural dislocations of which they are the sign. The critique focuses in particular upon the effects of social arrangements in which the individual is called upon to realize his or her being. There is thus a sense in which Soyinka may be said to be concerned with the African lifeworld.

Soyinka's critical approach is evident as much in the comic and satirical plays as in the serious and reflective ones, the two veins constituting together a means of establishing what one might call an axiology. It has been said in rebuke of Soyinka that his satire in particular presents a limited and distorted view of humanity he deals with and that, in a play like "The Lion and the Jewel," for instance, it leads to a conservative and even reactionary position. An accusation that he was also to encounter with regard to "Death and the King's Horseman." It could be argued that the use of satire in presenting a situation of cultural disorientation is a necessary part of the demonstration that Soyinka is intent upon making, especially in the political plays. Thus, the character Bero, in "Madmen and Specialists" is the conception of the critical import of satire that presides at the inspiration in which Soyinka sends up

three infamous African tyrants, Idi Amin, Jean Bedel Bokassa and Mengistu Haile Mariam. It must be said, however, that there are situations where the effect of satire can be limited, where a more earnest tone is required in order to fully convey the weight of the issues at stake.

We have to recognize, however, that for Soyinka, satire is in essence, a tentative form of statement, the means to the establishment of a human norm within the common framework of moral reference.

The visionary direction of Soyinka's work arises from this moral grounding of his expression. If we consider the relationship between Soyinka's interest in the fate of the individual set against the collectivity in such plays as "Kongi's Harvest" and "Madmen and Specialists," we understand that the fundamental question in all these plays, as indeed in all his works, is that of moral choices in a situation where the structure and conventions of life have been disrupted and a new code of reference, pointing to a new order of existence, has not yet emerged.

It is indeed the tensions set up by this movement that Soyinka's work dramatizes, and his purpose in doing so is to propose a larger meaning of the collective life in which they can be exorcised. I use the word "exorcised" advisedly, for it becomes clear that the purpose of the work and the meaning Soyinka attaches to it, have ultimately a spiritual

dimension. His recourse to the ritual modes of symbolic expression is an indication of the visionary intent of his work, which as we know has been concretized in the myth of Ogun. Soyinka provides an intellectual formulation, in "The Fourth Stage" of this myth, and of its significance in the context of the traditional Yoruba world. We are not obliged to accept his interpretation either of the myth or of a Yoruba collective consciousness he posits in association with the myth as having a factual, objective value, but we cannot overlook its importance for the ritual and symbolic connotations it determines in his work, and its correspondence to the visionary purpose of his creative effort. I would for my part qualify the mythic or mythopoeic element of Soyinka's thought and imagination as being essentially the foundation for his elaboration of a large metaphor of an organic wholeness of life and consciousness. Myth thus serves in his work as the mediating image and principle of a responsive disposition to the currents of life in the universe which hold out a promise of communal regeneration. The vitalism that this vein conditions in his work, especially in the poetry, testifies to the spirit of celebration that, despite the tragic sense of life his work so often displays, illuminates his expression. This aspect of Soyinka's work is most evident in the dramas.

Soyinka once described the writer as the voice of vision in his own

time. He has more lately reformulated this idea by specifying the vocation he ascribes to the writer in terms of the bardic function that belongs properly to the poet. Thus he writes:

"Unlike the theologian, who takes his voice from the realms of deities, the poet appropriates the voice of the people and the full burden of their memory."

His drama, in its affirmative tone, is best described as the exploration of the rituals of life, of those areas of creative endeavour and realms of consciousness in which are anchored the collective identity of his people.

As the play "Madmen and Specialists" indicates, this grim reality of our contemporary tragedy has occupied his attention ever since, and forms a recurring theme in his poetry. The tenacious hold on his mind and the imagination of the African nightmare is projected in the section entitled "Elegies" in his recent volume "Outsiders and Samarkand," as is evidenced by such poems as "Elegy for a Nation" and "Children of this Land". And even while in the "Ah, Demosthenes!" he dedicates himself anew to the vocation of the poet as gadfly, he comes near to despair when he contemplates the despicable causes for which writing can be enlisted.

But in one of the interludes by which the volume is marked, there

is a restorative vision as he draws on the resources of nature, as in "Visiting Trees":

Myth thus serves in his work as the mediating image on a principle of a responsive disposition to the currents of life in the universe which hold out a promise of communal regeneration. The vitalism that his vein conditions in his work testifies to the spirit of celebration that, despite the tragic sense of life his work so often displays, constantly illuminates his expression. There is then a purposive energy in Soyinka's work which carries the import of a revolutionary will in his attitude to the world. Soyinka's refusal to accept the facile conventions of social arrangements has caused him to be branded an anarchist. But it is plain that he has worked from a deep and intense sense of community, conceived as a compact between individuals regulated by authentic values. In its specific reference to the historical situation he confronts, his work is intended as a remodeling of our contemporary consciousness, to move us beyond the ambiguities and confusions of the present dividedness of our collective self. It stands out in this light as a charter of moral imperatives and of a re-orientation of our collective existence towards a new dispensation.

I started this homage to Wole Soyinka by alluding to the contemporary disengagement of literature from experience in the

Western world, and by setting out a different measure for the appraisal of his work. I have endeavoured here to justify my point that the ruling canons of critical reception of literature challenge us to a dissenting view of its function in society. I'd like to go back on to the double perspective on imaginative creation with which I started – on the necessary relationship between the human relevance of a writer's work, its reference to and engagement with life in either its concrete aspects or its numinous implications, on one hand, and on the other, the aesthetic dimension of his work, the quality of expression by which his vision is projected and sustained. Soyinka's work has an exemplary value for us in this regard. It is profoundly implicated in the total experience in which the African continent is involved, an experience for which he has sought to be a witness, perhaps even a prophet, in the anguished but heartfelt commitment of the literary imagination to issues of the collective existence. At the same time, the work is distinguished by an elaboration of poetic values as an essential dimension of the collective awareness. Here, his reference to the ancestral inheritance of belief and spirituality invocation serves to ground his apprehension of life and to extend his vision in a transcendental system of reference. He has thus reanimated the guiding myths that have given meaning to life and consciousness in

the traditional world. And it is this remarkable conjunction of intense social consciousness and of an aesthetic sensibility allied to spiritual vision – it is this that constitutes for me his signal achievement.

Like the giant Iroko tree in a big forest, Professor Wole Soyinka stands out among writers as a colossus. He remains one of the most significant voices of his generation, using his creative ingenuity to fight the cause of humanity. Reputed for his assertion that justice is the first condition of humanity, Soyinka continues to use his prodigious talent in drama to define human existence even as he joins the league of septuagenarian.

Notes and references

¹Michael Thorpe, R.A. Foakes, D.E. Rhodes: "The Literary Half-Yearly," 1987, 97-98.

² Michael Thorpe, R.A. Foakes, D.E. Rhodes: "The Literary Half-Yearly," 1987, 98.

³Frantz Fanon (1925-1961) was a pre-eminent thinker of the twentieth century who dealt with the issue of decolonization and the psychopathology of colonization.

⁴Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin (1935- 1975) was a Russian philosopher and literary scholar who wrote influential works in literary theory and literary criticism.

⁵Zodwa Motsa is a South African scholar. She is a Proffessor of English Literature in the University of South Africa.

Lula Kang

Kajal

APPENDIX

APPENDIX 1

WOLE SOYINKA: A CHRONOLOGY

1934: Born Oluwole Akinwande Soyinka on July 13 in Ijebu, Isara in Western Nigeria. His father Ayo was a school supervisor and his mother Eniola "a trader."

1957: Begins work for M. A. at Leeds but abandons graduate studies to work in theater; serves as play reader for Royal Court Theatre, London.

September 1958: Produces "The Swamp Dwellers" for the University of London Drama Festival.

February 1959: "The Swamp Dwellers" and "The Lion and the Jewel" produced in Ibadan; November: Writes, produces, and acts in a "An Evening without Decor," a medley of his work, at the Royal Court Theatre, London; attacks racism and colonial repression in Africa in these and other works.

1960: Returns to Nigeria; March: "The Trials of Brother Jero" produce at Ibadan; May: Acts role of Yang Sun in "The Good Woman" of Setzuan at Ibadan; October: completes, directs, and acts in "A Dance of the Forests" with his own acting company, 1960 Masks.

1961-1964: Directs plays by other playwrights, Ibadan; attacks political intriguing, corruption, and manipulation of mass media in "The (new) Republican" and "Before the Blackout."

1960-1962: Rockefeller Research Fellow; attached to English Department at the University of Ibadan studying African drama; December: "Towards a True Theatre" (essay); writes political satire on based on emergency in Western Nigeria.

1962-1963: Lecturer, Department of English, University of Ife

1963: "Culture in Transition" (film)

December 1964: Founds, with others, the Drama Association of Nigeria.

1965: "The Interpreters" (novel) published in London; April: Writes and directs "Before the Blackout," Orisun Theatre; directs "Kongi's Harvest," Lagos; September: records "The Detainee" for BBC in London.

1965-1967: Senior lecturer, Department of English, University of Lagos; criticizes personality cults and dictatorship in Africa.

April 1966: Revives "Kongi's Harvest," Dakkar festival; June: "Trials of Brother Jero" produced, Hampstead Theatre Club, London; December: "The Lion and the Jewel," Royal Court Theatre, London; shares John Whiting Award with Tom Stoppard.

1967: Head of the Department of Theater Arts, University of Ibadan; June: "The Writer in a Modern African State;" August to October 1969 imprisoned for writings sympathetic to secessionist Biafra; September: "The Lion and the Jewel" produced Accra; November: "Trials of Brother Jero" and "The Strong Breed" produced, Greenwich Mews Theatre, New York; "Idanre and Other Poems."

April 1968: "Kongi's Harvest," produced by Negro Ensemble Company, New York.

February 1969: "The Road" produced by Theatre Limited, Kampala, Uganda; "Poems from Prison," London.

August 1970: Completes and directs "Madmen and Specialists" with Ibadan University Theatre Arts Company in New Haven, Connecticut (at Yale); play tours to Harlem; directs plays by Pirandello and others; "Kongi's Harvest" (film).

1971: "A Shuttle in the Crypt" (poems); March: revives "Madmen and Specialists" in Ibadan; acts Patrice Lumumba in John Littlewood's French production of Conor Cruise O'Brien's "Murderous Angels," Paris; testifies before Kazeem Enquiry on violation of students' rights.

1972: Publishes his prison notes, "The Man Died," London; July: produces extracts from "A Dance of the Forests" in Paris.

1973: Honorary Ph. D., University of Leeds; "Season of Anomy" (novel); "Collected Plays I," August: National Theatre, London, produces "Bacchae of Euripides," which it commissioned.

1973-74: Overseas Fellow, Churchill College, Cambridge, and Visiting Professor of English, University of Sheffield; "Collected Plays II."

1975: Edited "Poems of Black Africa," London and New York; "Neo-Tarzanism: The Poetics of Pseudo-Tradition" (essay); attacks Idi Amin in Transition.

1976: "Ogun Abibiman" (poems); "Myth, Literature, and the African World;" Visiting Professor, Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, Legon; Professor, University of Ife; September: Nairobi High School production of "A Dance of the Forests;" October: French production of "A Dance of the Forests," Dakar, Gambia; December: produces "Death and the King's Horseman," Ife.

1978: "Language as Boundary" (essay)

1981: "Aké: The Years of Childhood" (autobiography); "Opera Wonyosi," an adaptation of Brecht's "Three Penny Opera;" "The Critic and Society: Barthes, Leftocracy, and Other Mythologies" (essay).

1982: "Blues for the Prodigal" (film) released; "Cross Currents: The 'New African' after Cultural Encounters" (essay).

December 1983: "Die Still, Rev. Dr. Godspcak" (radio play); "Requiem for a Futurologist" (play) produced at Ife university; "Blues for a

Prodigal" (film); "Shakespeare and the Living Dramatist" (essay); (July) - Unlimited Liability Company (phonograph recording).

1984: "A Play of Giants" (play)

1985: "Requiem for a Futorologist" published; "Climates of Art" (Herbert Read Memorial Lecture), Institute of Contemporary Art, London.

1986: Nobel Prize for Literature. "The External Encounter: Ambivalence in African Arts and Literature" (essay), "A Play of Giants" (play), Fellow, Society for the Humanities, Cornell University; Agip Prize for Literature; 1986 (October); Awarded of Nigeria's second highest honour, Commander of the Federal Republic, CFR.;

1987: "Six Plays;" "Childe Internationale" (play) republished.

1989: "The Search" (short story).

1991: Sisi Clara Workshop on Theatre (Lagos); "A Scourge of Hyacinths" (radio play) BBC African Service; "The Credo of Being and Nothingness" (The First Rev. Olufosoye Annual Lecture in Religion, delivered at the University of Ibadan on January 25th, 1991; published

1992: "From Zia With Love"

1993: Honorary doctorate, Harvard University

1994: Ibadan: "The Penkelemes Years (A Memoir: 1946-1965)"

(autobiography); "Memories of a Nigerian Childhood;" Flees Nigeria (November).

1995: "The Beatification of Area Boy"

1996: "The Open Sore of a Continent: A Personal Narrative of the Nigerian Crisis"

March 1997: Charged with treason by military dictatorship. Considered one of the greatest African poets alongside Cesair, Senghor, Okigbo, Ohanyido, Okara, Clark and so forth.

2005: Together with Nigerian elder statesman Chief Anthony Enahoro, he convened an alternative national confab under the aegis of PRONACO (Pro -national conference group).

APPENDIX 2

COMPLETE WORKS OF WOLE SOYINKA

1. Soyinka, Wole: "The Swamp Dwellers," London, Oxford University Press, 1958.
2. ____: "The Lion and the Jewel," London, Oxford University Press, 1959.
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APPENDIX 3

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